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**WHAT FACTORS AFFECT THE ADOPTION OF  
RESEARCH WITHIN EDUCATIONAL POLICY  
MAKING?**

**HOW MIGHT A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF  
THESE FACTORS IMPROVE RESEARCH  
ADOPTION AND AID THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
POLICY?**

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**Submitted for the degree of DPhil in Education  
University of Sussex  
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## **iii – List of abbreviations**

CDA:	Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995)
DCSF:	Department for Children Schools and Families
DfE:	Department for Education.
DfES:	Department for Education and Skills
EPPE:	<i>Effective Pre-School and Primary Education</i> longitudinal study
EPPI-Centre:	The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre
SAM:	Social Activity Method (Dowling, 2005; 2007; 2008; 2008a)
TDA:	Training and Development Agency for Schools
TLRP:	Teaching and Learning Research Programme

## **iv – Summary**

### **UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX**

Christopher David Brown

DPhil in Education

June 2011

### **TITLE OF THESIS**

What factors affect the adoption of research within educational policy making?

How might a better understanding of these factors improve research adoption and aid the development of policy?

### **ABSTRACT**

This study addresses two questions: “What factors affect the adoption of research within educational policy making?” and “How might a better understanding of these factors improve research adoption and aid the development of policy?” In investigating the concept of research adoption, which I regard as vital to the successful creation of ‘evidence-informed’ policies/policy instruments, it is hoped that the study’s conclusions will assist researchers seeking to influence policy development, whilst also aiding policy-makers who wish to inform their policies with evidence.

I begin the study by critically engaging with the concept of evidence-informed policy making. I then shift my focus to the theoretical field of knowledge transfer/exchange. The assumptions that subsequently emerge from this engagement and which form the conceptual basis of the thesis are that: evidence-informed policy is dependent on the prior adoption of research by policy-makers, and; that adoption itself depends both upon effective communication by research ‘suppliers’ and effective reception on the part of research audiences. Building on these assumptions, I then establish the individual factors that are considered to be vital in facilitating the research adoption process.

These adoption factors are afforded further explanatory power through their combination with the theoretical framework I have employed for the thesis; Social Activity Method (SAM). In brief, SAM argues that the social world comprises people



undertaking actions that lead to them building, maintaining or destroying relationships with one another. For this study, I regard research adoption as the establishment of a successful relationship between policy-makers and researchers. Consequently, the processes involved in the communication of research are seen to represent the actions employed by researchers in order to establish such a relationship; these can be juxtaposed against the research reception (or audience) actions displayed by policy-makers.

Combining these research adoption factors together with SAM enables me to construct a new model of research adoption which, I propose, provides a more nuanced and effective way of explaining how and why research might be adopted than existing work in this area. In summary, the model promotes the idea that adoption will depend on sociological questions: is the researcher privileged by the policy-maker in question? is the area of study situated within a wider corpus of knowledge? The answers to these questions affect the specific adoption 'scenario' faced by researchers and policy-makers and, consequently, the nature and type of any factors affecting research adoption which researchers and policy-makers will need to develop strategies to overcome.

The primary methodology I employ is that of the in-depth, semi-structured interview. To inform these interviews, key issues from the literature review were identified and rhetorical analysis also utilised. As a result of undertaking 24 interviews with researchers, policy-makers and other knowledge providers within the education sector in England, I identify four key research adoption strategies that could be used by academic researchers to improve the knowledge adoption process. These are: the creation of 'policy ready' outputs (designed to increase demand for a given study by improving understanding of how its findings might be applied or utilised); traditional outputs (which serve to enhance perceptions of the study's quality and rigour); promotional strategies (which relate to the way research is disseminated, both in terms of its communication and in terms of the techniques or modes employed), and; 'contextual' strategies (which attempt to improve the reputation of the researcher or the social robustness of the idea to which their research pertains). At the same time I critically examine the assumptions which underlie why these strategies are regarded as key and outline how inequalities in power relations between policy-makers and researchers might be redressed.

## **v – Acknowledgements**

I am very grateful to Professor Judy Sebba and Dr Elaine Sharland for their guidance, feedback and encouragement throughout the course of my DPhil. I would also like to thank the academic researchers, politicians, civil servants, suppliers of research and those otherwise engaged in the policy-evidence interface who consented to be interviewed and who took the time to review my conclusions. Finally I would like to give warm thanks to Kitty Brown and Mathilda Brown for their patience and support and to Victor Burgess and Peter Brown for their assistance in proof reading, sense checking and particularly to Victor for the use of Manse.

**vi – Statement**

This thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other University for the award of a degree and will not be submitted in whole or part to another University for any future degree awards. The study is based upon a combination of existing literature and empirical investigation and, as such, comprises original work undertaken by myself. The length of this thesis (excluding Appendices and corrections) is 79, 928 words.

Chris Brown:.....

## **1 – Introduction**

The genesis of this thesis may be traced to my 'insider' position within government; obtained through my roles both as a researcher within education and also, latterly, as a senior policy advisor within the Ministry of Justice. From these roles a myriad of interlinked questions have emerged over a period of years. These questions have been directed at a series of targets and are centred around a number of themes: what is the role of evidence and the weight of impact of evidence within policy making? What factors hinder or promote the use of evidence in developing policy? What mechanisms do researchers and other 'suppliers' of evidence employ to ensure their findings are 'heard' by policy-makers? And finally, what more could be done by researchers to maximize the impact of their work and by policy-makers to take on board evidence as part of their decision making?

These questions initially led me to develop a broad case study of one government agency (Brown, 2009); but the 15,000 word count for my MRes dissertation proved inadequate for a full and nuanced exploration of the phenomena I was and am most interested in. Thus my empirical journey has led me to this point: to seek to provide a better understanding of how and why research is adopted by policy-makers within education and how this might be improved.

### **1.1 – Context**

This study has been concerned with addressing two questions: “What factors affect the adoption of research within educational policy making?” and “How might a better understanding of these factors improve research adoption and aid the development of policy”. In seeking to investigate the factors that affect the adoption of evidence<sup>1</sup>, it is hoped that the study will help facilitate the efforts of researchers in academe, and elsewhere should they wish to influence policy/policy debates. This will be achieved by providing ‘strategems’ (Weiss, 1982), which aim to enhance the potential for academic research to be used in the creation of policy.

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<sup>1</sup> I later demonstrate that the terms ‘research’ (or specifically, ‘research findings’), ‘evidence’ and ‘Mode 2’ knowledge, fully encompass the spectrum of what it is that educational policy-makers consider in the creation of (research-based) ‘evidence’ informed-policy. These concepts thus form my terms of reference for this thesis and, as such, I have collectively defined them as data that has been gathered via a process of research, which has been interpreted and which subsequently has or could be used to address a particular policy issue. Because of this collective meaning I have felt able to use these terms interchangeably throughout the thesis. More detail is provided in section 2.1 (p. 13) and Appendix C (234).

This section of the thesis provides the context and background to the study, outlines the issues that I seek to address and provides a compelling case to establish their importance.

### **1.1.1 – An initial introduction to the discourse of evidence-informed policy making**

In March 2008, Professor Robert Slavin gave a lecture at an education conference on evidence-based reform in education. In the speech Professor Slavin stated that:

Evidence-based reform in any area creates a dynamic of progressive improvement, in which many researchers and developers are working to replace today's best solutions with something more effective, confident that policy-makers and the market will enthusiastically adopt proven innovations.  
(2008: 4)

Key to the success of Slavin's notion of "evidence-based reform" is the adoption of new or existing evidence by policy-makers<sup>2</sup>: such adoption is the integral idea behind the concept of evidence-based policy.

Campbell *et al.* (2007) note that within government there have been a number of recent initiatives designed to enhance policy-makers' understanding of the importance of evidence and to encourage its adoption and use when developing policy. These include the 1999 White Paper's *Modernising Government* agenda, which outlines the need for policy to be based on high quality evidence in order for it to be more responsive to the demands and requirements of citizens, and the publication by the Cabinet Office (1999a) of *Professional Policy Making for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The latter identifies a number of core competencies or principles associated with good policy making and throughout a strong emphasis is placed on ensuring that policy is based on evidence which details 'what works'<sup>3</sup>. It also highlights the need for government departments to ensure that their policy-makers are provided with accessible and actionable evidence. Subsequent papers have included: *Adding it up* (Cabinet Office, 2000), which reviewed policy analysis and modelling in government and, more

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<sup>2</sup> Within this thesis, policy-makers are envisaged as comprising Ministers and Civil Servants operating within central government.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'what works' was originally conceived of in order to discuss the efficacy of specific interventions (Gough, 2007; Slavin, 2002), but has now come to mean the extent to which a given policy at any level, from a classroom to the national, can effect change.

recently, the *Professional Skills for Government*<sup>4</sup> programme, a key part of the drive to reform the public services by ensuring that policy-makers have the skills required to deliver effective solutions, including the ability to identify and use ‘appropriate’ evidence.

My study is rooted within this general discourse of advocacy and consequently has at its heart the assumption that evidence-based policy making within education should, at least theoretically, lead to better developed policy. In other words, policy that is more effective, equitable and efficient in terms of its value for money (Oxman *et al.*, 2009). I begin, therefore, with the notion that it is inherently more sensible for policy-makers to consider evidence when developing policy with, for example, implications for the education received by some 7.4 million pupils<sup>5</sup> in England or that affects a school workforce of some 789,000 staff<sup>6</sup>, than policy being developed ‘off the cuff’, without recourse to information that might lead to its improvement. In other words, as suggested in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) examiners’ *Report on Educational Research and Development in England*: “good decisions are informed decisions” (Wolter *et al.*, 2002: 514). Or, as Levin (2008) and Sanderson (2010) argue, we should not be blinded to the potentially positive influence of evidence on policy. It is noted, however, that it is somewhat ironic that there is little actual empirical evidence detailing the benefits of adopting an evidence-based approach (e.g. see Davies *et al.*, 2000 and Cooper and Levin, 2010).

At the same time it is also acknowledged that the rhetoric of evidence-based policy often differs from the reality of how policy is developed and how research findings are utilised as part of the policy making process. Campbell *et al.* (2007) note from their study of 42 policy-makers within government, for instance, that the majority felt, as a process, policy making was more ‘messy’ than ‘linear’ and that evidence was just one factor to be taken into consideration. Thus, Campbell *et al.* surmise that, amongst the policy-makers they interviewed, few would be likely to propose that a literal approach to evidence-based policy making should actually be undertaken. This conclusion is compounded by the suggestion that, in the short term, policy-makers’ ‘use’ of evidence is more likely to be ‘conceptual’ rather than ‘instrumental’ in nature: that is, evidence is more likely to lead to changes in individual policy-makers’ overall levels of knowledge or understanding (‘conceptual’ use) than to changes in their actual behavior or practice

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/people/psg/index.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> See: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000843/index.shtml>

<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000874/index.shtml>

(‘instrumental’ use) unless a significant, and overwhelmingly accepted weight of evidence, has built up over time (Weiss, 1979, 1982; Huberman, 1992; Gladwell, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Levin, 2008). As a consequence, the development of policy is unlikely to be either immediately related to the findings of a study that has been relayed to policy-makers, or based solely on the findings of just one study.

Duncan (2005) suggests, therefore, that the idea of ‘evidence-inspired’ policy might be seen as more appropriate than a strict interpretation of the term ‘evidence-based’. A similar view is also held by Davies (2000) and Sebba (2000) who, in the main, refer to ‘evidence-informed’ policy. For the purposes of this thesis, whilst the terms ‘evidence-based’ and ‘evidence-informed’ may be used interchangeably, the underlying meaning behind them will be that proposed by Davies (2004): guidance provided to and sought by policy-makers, to assist them in their decision making. In this sense, this study is taking evidence to represent a metaphorical streetlight rather than a signpost – something that illuminates rather than provides the only source of direction.

It is my argument that evidence can only be used once policy-makers have digested, accepted and then ‘taken it on board’, either as a result of being exposed to the findings of one study or, in the long term, as they become aware of an accumulation of knowledge on a given topic. I therefore employ the term ‘adoption’ to describe the processes that lie behind any utilisation of evidence by policy-makers. I regard ‘adoption’ as being flexible in nature: it can account for scenarios in which policy-makers take on board evidence, but do not necessarily (or initially) act on it. Here adoption results in knowledge being added to a policy-maker’s tacit knowledge base and so ‘stored’ for later use. In this situation, adoption may be considered synonymous with the notion of the conceptual use of research (that is, adoption will increase policy-makers’ overall level of understanding on a given topic). But adoption also accounts for what happens before any instrumental use of research occurs, or even before research is used to justify an existing decision (the ‘symbolic’ use of research: Weiss, 1979, 1982). This is because knowledge must be digested, accepted and then taken on board before it can be used in the formation of policy, or to justify a given policy decision or stance. Some policy decisions will, of course, involve little or no research adoption at all.

Whilst I contend that evidence-informed policy is dependent on an initial adoption of knowledge by policy-makers, adoption itself may occur quite separately from the policy making process: for example, policy-makers may take on board the findings of

research without any short term need to relate those findings to a particular policy stream. As such, it is argued that adoption may be viewed as an independent or standalone (inter)active process which can occur either socially, through exchanges between researchers and policy-makers, or via engagement with research texts which are subsequently interpreted and (re)contextualised by the policy-maker. It is also contended that, as a concept, 'adoption', although clearly related to, differs from existing notions such as 'knowledge exchange', which has been defined as:<sup>7</sup>

Knowledge exchange is collaborative problem-solving between researchers and decision makers.

This is because 'adoption' is not necessarily dependent on collaborative effort between researchers and policy-makers, nor does it assume that there is a two way flow with the policy-maker giving something back to the researcher (something any exchange must involve).

In addition to the discourse of advocacy for evidence-informed policy, there is also an extensively documented critical discourse surrounding the concept of evidence-informed policy making. This alternative discourse is populated with suggestions and hypotheses for why evidence-informed policy has or has not, or indeed should not or cannot, be implemented. Such debates are rooted in fundamental concepts, including notions of ideology, epistemology and the nature and manifestation of power (Hammersley, 2001; Nutley *et al.*, 2002; Gough, 2004; Davies, 2004; 2007; MacLure, 2005; Sharland and Taylor, 2006; Biesta, 2007; Levin, 2008). Such critiques and issues are fully explored within the first part of the literature review (chapter 2). In particular, in section 2.3 (p. 19), I examine the compatibility of a postmodern<sup>8</sup> outlook with the epistemological implications of adopting an evidence-informed approach. Alongside this, I critically assess whether basing policies on evidence is necessarily reliant on the ontological position commonly described as 'naïve realism'. The implications associated with an imbalance in power/discursive control between policy-

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<sup>7</sup> See: [http://www.chsrf.ca/knowledge\\_transfer/index\\_e.php](http://www.chsrf.ca/knowledge_transfer/index_e.php)

<sup>8</sup> Here I am using the term 'postmodern' to refer to a philosophical position based on an epistemological perspective that rejects positivistic type attempts to discover true and certain knowledge about the world as it 'really is' (Crotty, 1998). This rejection is also combined with the notion that any understanding or representation of the world will be influenced by existing and dominant power relations (Stronach and MacLure; 1997). Knowledge is viewed by postmodernists, therefore, as always representational and consequently, as Mirchandani (2005) maintains, complex and fractured and uncertain. A fuller discussion is provided in Appendix A (p. 223)



makers and academics are analysed in section 2.4 (p. 22). I also use this section to introduce the concept of 'critical policy sociology' (Foucault, 1980; Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Strathern, 2000; Ball, 2007; 2008; Ball and Exley, 2010).

Chapter 2, the first section of the literature review therefore provides the study's wider context. In doing so, it firstly discusses the nature of evidence-informed policy making (section 2.1; p. 13) before engaging with key debates such as the feasibility, or even the desirability, of undertaking an evidence-informed approach (sections 2.2 to 2.6; pp. 18-37). I conclude the chapter by suggesting that any realization of evidence-informed policy will depend upon the creation of knowledge which conforms to existing and dominant ideological and epistemological paradigms (section 2.7; p. 37): that is, knowledge which investigates the subject areas policy-makers are most interested in, using the methods they prefer. As a result of this conjoin of ideology and epistemology policy 'agoras' or market places (Gibbons, 1999; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003) will be formed. Agoras thus represent the gamut of knowledge and ideas that policy-makers are most likely to consider when developing policy. The nature of policy agoras, and of the knowledge providers that operate within them, including the implications of such a conclusion for the nature of the evidence that is actively considered by policy-makers (and for the process of knowledge adoption), is then also explored.

### **1.1.2 – The importance of the effective communication and reception of knowledge**

Several writers (e.g. Nutley *et al.*, 2007) have concluded that a key influencing factor, in terms of whether evidence is adopted by policy-makers, relates to how research is communicated. Sharples (2010) suggests that the communication of evidence, as a concept, encompasses a range of factors. These include the clarity of content, the tailoring of content to the audience, the communication channels and formats utilized and so on. One example of how the effective communication of research findings has successfully influenced policy is taken from the *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE) 3-11 study* (Taggart *et al.*, 2008) and is set out in Appendix E (p. 240).

Within my study the assumption is thus made that it is essential for research findings to be communicated or disseminated effectively if they are to be adopted by policy-makers in the development of policy. In other words, it is assumed that evidence must

successfully reach the ears of policy-makers in order for it to be utilised by them. At the same time, it is also argued that the successful adoption of research is as dependent on policy-makers constituting capable audiences for the message, as it is on academics being compelling narrators. As well as effective communication, research adoption also therefore requires the existence of suitable mechanisms, infrastructures and types of culture or behaviour within government departments and agencies to ensure that evidence is actively considered during the policy making process (Banks, 2009).

Conceptually, both the need for compelling communication and the capability to receive knowledge sit within the broader theoretical field of knowledge transfer/knowledge exchange. Consequently the focus of the study shifts from a wider consideration of the issues associated with employing an evidence-informed approach, to centre on how and why research is adopted (primarily within, but also outside of the policy agora). This shift is reflected in chapter 3, which moves to further define the thesis' problematic (Brown and Dowling, 1998) by establishing the factors that are considered to be vital to the adoption of research (sections 3.1 to 3.3; pp. 44-73). In turn, once elaborated, in section 3.4 (p. 73) these factors are divided into whether they are *internal* to a given study (i.e. are factors that can be 'managed' by a researcher) or *external* to that study (i.e. policy-maker controlled). For example, *internal* (researcher controlled) factors include how 'accessible' research findings are (Lavis *et al.*, 2003; Davies, 2006; Brown, 2009) or the efficacy of the mode of communication employed (Paisley, 1993; Mortimore, 2000; Cohn, 2006; Davies, 2006; Lavis, 2006; Levin, 2008; Brown, 2009). *External* factors (i.e. those controlled by the audience for the evidence), on the other hand, include factors such as how credible policy-makers perceive the source of the research to be (Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Campbell *et al.*, 2007) and how easily accessible policy-makers are to researchers (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Levin, 2004; Council for Science and Technology, 2008).

These *internal* and *external* factors are afforded further explanatory power through their combination with the theoretical framework for this study; Social Activity Method (detailed below and in section 3.5; p. 75). As a result *internal*, *external* and theory come together to form the basis of a new model of research adoption, which, it is proposed, provides a more nuanced and effective way of explaining why and how knowledge might be adopted by policy-makers than does existing work in this area (section 3.6; p. 80). In summary, the model highlights the idea that adoption will depend on sociological questions: is the researcher privileged by the policy-maker in

question? Is the area of study seen as socially robust? The answers to these questions, in turn, affect the specific knowledge adoption 'scenario' faced by researchers and policy-makers, with both policy-makers (as audiences) and researchers (as communicators) responsible for the given (*internal* and *external*) factors which will affect any attempt at adoption within that scenario. Thus the model illustrates, for all relevant scenarios, the types of strategies researchers will need to develop if they are successfully to communicate evidence to policy-makers, and vice versa for policy-makers looking to act as receptive audiences. What is missing from the model, however, is an understanding of what those strategies might be (sections 3.6 to 3.7; pp. 80-89). These, along with the face validity of the model, are subsequently explored within the empirical aspect of this thesis (chapters 5 to 7; pp. 116-180); specifically I focus on the adoption strategies that might be employed by academics, proposing that an appropriate follow-on study should be to undertake a similar analysis for policy-makers.

As a result of undertaking 24 semi-structured in-depth interviews with researchers, policy-makers and other knowledge providers I incorporate into the model four key strategies that are, or need to be, developed by academic researchers in order that research can be adopted by those responsible for the development of policy (chapter 8; p. 182). These are: the creation of 'policy ready' outputs (designed to increase policy-makers' demand for a given study by improving their understanding of how the findings of study may be applied or utilised); traditional outputs (those associated with a career in academe, which serve to enhance perceptions of quality and rigour, and the credibility of the academic); promotional strategies (which relate to the way research is disseminated, both in terms of its communication and in terms of the techniques or modes employed), and 'contextual' strategies (which attempt to improve the reputation of the researcher or the social robustness of the idea to which that their research pertains).

At the same time, I critically examine the assumptions which underlie why these strategies are regarded as key and outline where inequalities in power relations between policy-makers and researchers should be redressed. This is not with a view to promote an unrealistically fundamental redistribution of power between researchers and policy-makers, but to highlight, in the case of knowledge adoption, where redistributions might be both feasible and desirable.

## 1.2 – Empirical setting

The empirical setting for this study is broadly defined as the nexus of social actors associated with policy making within the education sector in England. In particular, the policy-makers, government researchers, academic researchers and other suppliers of knowledge who operate within this arena. As such, the sample includes politicians involved in education, civil service policy-makers and researchers from the Department for Education (DfE), those operating at the higher levels of Davies' (2006) policy making 'food chain' such as special advisors, experts and think tanks, as well as key players from the world of academe (see sub-section 4.4.2; p. 95).

## 1.3 – Approach and methods

As detailed in section 4.4 (p. 94), the primary methodology employed is that of the in-depth, semi-structured interview. To inform the question areas to be explored in the interviews, key issues from the literature review were identified and rhetorical analysis also employed. The use of rhetorical analysis follows on from suggestions made in Brown (2009), which notes that future studies in the area of effective research communication should consider undertaking an investigation of Professor Sir Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed's (2007) *How the world's best performing school systems come out on top*. In particular, that such an investigation should attempt to understand what makes Barber and Mourshed's study so appealing to policy-makers and what can be learnt from how it presents its arguments. It should be noted, however, that whilst *How the world's best...* should be considered more a think piece than academic research; due, for example, to its use of undisclosed interview data and its omission of any detailed methodology, its influence amongst educational policy-makers means that it is regarded as a document that presents its arguments well, and so is a valid subject for rhetorical exploration (the nature of rhetorical analysis is described in section 4.8; p. 107, the analysis itself provided in Appendix M; p. 261).

## 1.4 – Theory and the theoretical framework

The theoretical field within which this thesis is situated is broad and varied. As well as covering literature surrounding both the concept of evidence-informed policy making and that relating to broad subject areas such as epistemology and ontology, this thesis significantly engages with a number of other theories and concepts. First, the field of ‘knowledge transfer’/‘knowledge exchange’. Definitions of knowledge transfer/exchange include the following developed by Mitton *et al.* (2007:729): “Knowledge transfer and exchange (KTE) is an interactive process involving the interchange of knowledge between research users and researcher producers.” Secondly, Foucault’s (1980; 1984) notions of power, knowledge and discourse and how inequalities in power between researchers and policy-makers can make problematic the process of knowledge adoption. Further detail is provided in Appendix B (p. 231). Thirdly, Ball’s (2007, 2008: 5) concept of ‘critical policy sociology’, which attends to the language of policy: in particular, its rhetorical mechanics and use of discourse. As part of a wider analysis of ideology and power, critical policy sociology provides insight into ways of seeing “how policy discourses work to privilege certain ideas and topics and speakers and exclude others”.

Finally, ‘Mode 2’ knowledge, ‘socially robust’ knowledge and the ‘agora’. Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) use the concept of ‘Mode 2’ to highlight changing trends in the production of knowledge. In particular, they suggest a shift from the traditional academic disciplinary based linear modes of production (‘Mode 1’), to one where knowledge is generated in a context of application. Related to the concept of ‘Mode 2’ knowledge is the concept of ‘socially robust’ knowledge. Gibbons (1999) suggests that ‘socially robust’ knowledge is that which has not simply originated from good quality research, but that is also likely to be understood and accepted by society. Finally; Nowotny *et al.* (2003) and Gibbons (1999) bring together these two concepts in their discussion of the ‘agora’. The agora may be viewed as a market place in which knowledge is both produced and traded.

In addition, it will be argued that current models attempting to explain research adoption are conceptually inadequate. In part this stems from such models failing to encapsulate the adoption of research as a social process involving interaction between policy-makers and researchers/the work of researchers (Wingens, 1990; Cooper *et al.*, 2009). Such an argument highlights the requirement both to locate a theory that accounts for why policy-makers and researcher interact and to adopt this theory when

engaging with the empirical. For this study, empirical analyses of research adoption are filtered through the theoretical lense developed by Dowling (2005; 2007; 2008; 2008a); Social Activity Method. Social Activity Method is described in detail in the literature review but, in brief, argues that the social world consists of people undertaking actions that lead to them building, maintaining or destroying relationships with one another. In the case of this project, the effective adoption of research findings is taken to represent the establishment of a successful relationship (or alliance) between policy-makers and researchers. The various aspects and elements of the communication of research can therefore represent the actions (strategies) employed by researchers in order to establish such a relationship; these can be juxtaposed against the research adoption strategies displayed by policy-makers.

## **1.5 – The structure of the thesis**

The structure of this thesis is set out as follows: the next chapter provides a critique of relevant literature surrounding the concept of evidence-informed policy making. I then focus on the factors associated with the effective adoption of knowledge, before engaging with Social Activity Method. This work is followed by sections on the approach, methods and analytical processes employed by the study. Also included here is an examination of the methodological implications for utilizing Social Activity Method, detail on the sample and ethical considerations. The remaining sections detail the findings and conclusions and their wider (practical and theoretical) implications. I end with suggested areas for further research.

In addition, there are a number of appendices attached to this thesis. These include: issues relating to the relationship between evidence informed policy making and epistemology/ontology (Appendix A; p. 223); an analysis of Foucaultian notions of knowledge, discourse and power (Appendix B; p. 231); a case study of how research has successfully influenced policy (Appendix E; p. 240); the research instruments employed (Appendices J to L; pp. 252-260), a rhetorical analysis of *How the world's best performing school systems come out on top* (Appendix M; p. 261) and the knowledge adoption strategies used by Barber and Mourshed (2007) and the *EPPE* team (Appendix N; p. 274). A full list may be found in the contents page.

Throughout the thesis, where government publications have been quoted, the specific name of the relevant department at the time of publication has been used. This means, therefore, that the names and terms, Department for Education (DfE), Department for

Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) have been used interchangeably.

## **2 – Literature review: the wider theoretical and empirical environment which encapsulates knowledge adoption**

I begin this section by examining the notion of evidence-informed policy making, the benefits of adopting an evidence-informed approach and the factors which are perceived to problematise its realisation. I then examine a number of concepts which have a fundamental impact on what ‘evidence-informed’ is likely to mean or comprise in practice and, consequently, which have a bearing on the process of knowledge adoption. These include: the impact evidence can have on policy making; how the epistemological and ontological perspectives held by policy-makers affect the nature of the evidence they are likely to consider; how concepts of power, ideology and discursive dominance determine ‘valid’ areas for empirical investigation and enforce policy-makers’ preferred choice of research methodology, and; changing perspectives on what knowledge is and of those who might influence policy development. After critiquing current existing models which describe and explain the process of knowledge adoption, I conclude this section by setting out my conceptualisation of the ‘policy agora’, which represents the gamut of knowledge and/or ideas that policy-makers are most likely to consider when developing policy.

### **2.1 – Evidence-informed policy: a definition and an initial analysis of the debates surrounding this concept**

It was noted in footnote 1, page 1, that I view the terms ‘research findings’, ‘evidence’ and ‘Mode 2’ knowledge, as encompassing the spectrum of what it is that educational policy-makers consider in the creation of (research-based) ‘evidence’ informed-policy. I have also defined these terms collectively as: “data that has been gathered via a process of research, which has been interpreted and which subsequently has or could be used to address a particular policy issue”. By using the term ‘interpreted’ I mean that which is presented is not simply the raw data produced during the research process, but the significance ascribed to the data by the researcher. Interpretation may thus range in scope from conclusions to implications to recommendations depending upon the researcher and their intentions as to how the evidence might be used. Because evidence is a product of both data collection and interpretation and because I am viewing evidence in the context of policy making, the notions of quality, usability and the relevance of evidence are also material to my definition and to the subsequent use or adoption of evidence by policy-makers. These latter terms will be discussed



later in this section and in chapter 3 (p. 44).

In itself, the concept of ‘evidence-informed policy making’<sup>9</sup> has been defined by Davies (2004: 5) as:

An approach that helps people make well informed decisions about policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence from research at the heart of policy development and implementation.

Banks (2009) argues that the term ‘evidence-informed’ has been most recently and explicitly popularised by Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’ administration (1997 to 2007) which was, in part, elected on a platform of ‘what matters is what works’ (Driver and Martell, 2002). The concept of evidence-informed policy making is not new, however. Davies (2007), for example, contends that evidence-informed policy is in fact a contemporary version of Comte’s conception of sociology as a means of improving the overall welfare of humanity, or even of Marx and Engel’s use of analysis as a means to bring about social or political change. Levin (2008) cites a more modern history, suggesting that the debates relating to evidence-informed policy may be found at least as far back as a 1982, where the subject is debated in a paper by Leithwood and Cousin. This though still indicates a history that is almost 30 years old.

The argument that policy-makers should attempt to readily engage with evidence has, nonetheless, begun to grow in stature in more recent times (Campbell *et al.*, 2007). It is contended by Gough (2004: 45), for instance, that: “the importance of research to policy making has become increasingly overt recently, with knowledge being seen to be given a higher profile”. Gough’s assertion is reflected in the discourse of the DCSF in its *Analysis and Evidence Strategy* (2008: 11), which states that: “[as part of the DCSF’s analytical priorities for 2008-09] we need to generate new insight to support the formulation of well grounded policy interventions”. Nutley *et al.* (2002: 2) also note that with regards to education and the wider social sciences, now more than ever, “a

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<sup>9</sup> Whilst my primary focus for this thesis is on educational policy making, the literature surrounding the concepts of evidence-informed policy and of knowledge exchange/transfer are situated in a myriad of sectors, for example: justice, health and social care. As such, generic references are made often throughout the text to ‘policy-makers’, ‘researchers’ or, simply, ‘policy’. This is done where the literature reviewed relates to conceptualisations of these actions or actors as a whole, but where any lessons, conclusions or implications can be directly attributable to the specific case of education. Likewise, when appropriate, examples from other sectors have also been employed where they serve to successfully illustrate specific points or concepts which can then be reapplied to the field of educational policy.

major concern for policy-makers and managers is how to ensure that research evidence has greater impact on the policy making process”.

The value and importance of policy-makers employing evidence as part of their decision making may be illustrated via the work of advocates such as Oakley, who argues that evidence-informed approaches ensure that “those who intervene in other people’s lives do so with the utmost benefit and least harm” (2000: 3). She later expands on this argument to maintain that:

Reality exists, and although we do not all see it in the same way, we share an interest in being able to live our lives as well as we can, free from ill informed intervention and in the best knowledge we can gather of what is likely to make all of us most healthy, most productive, most happy and most able to contribute to the common good.

(2000: 323)

Thus, Oakley argues, a moral imperative exists for policy-makers to only make decisions, or to take action, when armed with the best available evidence. Returning to my definition of evidence, policy-makers should therefore be seeking to employ research data which has been interpreted in such a way that it can be used to address a given policy issue and that the quality of both the data collection and the interpretation of the data they employ should be high. Issues relating to the quality of data collection and the interpretation of data are addressed in sub-section 3.1.6 (p. 49), below.

Failing to employ available evidence can also lead to situations where public money is wasted and members of society (often those who are vulnerable or socially excluded) are not offered treatments or interventions at points in their lives where doing so might provide most benefit. This is typified in the work of Scott *et al.* (2001) who, in their analysis of the financial cost of social exclusion, note that acts of antisocial behaviour (ASB) at the age of 10 are accurate predictors of the cost of public services consumed by a given group at age 28; typically a cost 10 times that of those with no ASB issues. Yet such costs could be avoided by policy-makers adopting effective, evidence-informed, early intervention strategies. Oxman *et al.* (2009) summarise the benefits of policy-makers adopting an evidence-informed approach by arguing that the utilisation of evidence increases the probability of policy being more effective, equitable and efficient in terms of its value for money.

Despite these potential benefits, some (e.g. Davies, 2004; Biesta, 2007) argue that it is doubtful that evidence-informed approaches can ever be realised. Gough (2004: 47), for instance, suggests that there is likely to be “variation in the efficiency in which [educational research] is implemented”. Slavin, lamenting the lack of progress in this area, argues that as a result: “the practice of education today is at much the same pre-scientific point as medicine was 100 years ago” and that “important decisions about educational programmes continue to be made based on marketing, word of mouth [and] tradition” (2008: 5).

Given my working definition of evidence, I view this critique in the first instance as relating to certain constituent elements of the production of evidence and its subsequent interpretation; consequently, I also relate such critique to the quality, usability and relevance of evidence to policy-makers. For example, in terms of timeliness, Hillage *et al.* (1998)<sup>10</sup> claim that there is a mismatch in timing between the needs of policy making and the typical length of research production cycles. With regards to the quality of the research process, Ofsted (Tooley and Darby, 1998)<sup>11</sup> conclude that over half of published research in education is ‘second rate’. The interpretation of data by researchers has also been critiqued for being esoteric and value-laden: in the 2003 paper *Great Expectations: the Social Sciences in Britain*, for example, it is suggested that some researchers appear oblivious to the context of their work or the needs of those commissioning it, produce ideologically pre-ordained answers and are unable to express their conclusions in ways that make them usable. Similarly, Levin (2003: 5) suggests that many policy-makers see educational research at best as failing to address their problems and at worst as “insufficient and flawed”. Davies (2006), meanwhile, claims that academic researchers are seen to undertake research in a theoretically driven way and encumber any conclusions with caveats and qualifications.

Any lack of policy development, directly informed by evidence, cannot be solely attributed to the constituent elements of the (educational) research process alone, however. Gough (2004) argues that policy-makers have a number of issues to consider

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<sup>10</sup> Critiques of Hillage *et al.* (1998) do, of course, also exist. For example, in his paper *Excellence in research on schools - a commentary* Goldstein (n.d.) describes the work of Hillage *et al.* as “superficial” and “based upon poor ‘evidence’”. See: [http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/team/HG\\_Personal/excelres.pdf](http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/team/HG_Personal/excelres.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> In *How can we evaluate Educational research?* Goldstein (n.d.) also provides a critique of Ofsted’s review of educational research. See: [http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/team/HG\\_Personal/tooley-darby-critique.pdf](http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/team/HG_Personal/tooley-darby-critique.pdf)

in the development of policy, of which available research is only one. This view is shared by Pestieau (2003) who contends that policy making is more akin to art than science and that policy decisions can often be as 'irrational' as they are unpredictable. Lavis (2006) maintains that debate surrounding the issues which merit government action, the most appropriate way to develop a policy in response and how policies should best be implemented, all take place within a highly complex environment. As such, he suggests policy development is affected by factors such as institutional arrangements, individual or group interests and external events (for example, global recession). Davies (2004) too highlights seven factors, other than evidence, which are likely to play a key role in the development of policy. These are: experience, expertise and judgement, resources, tradition or habit, values, outside influence such as that from lobbyists, pressure groups and consultants, contingencies and, lastly, pragmatics (a list to which Perry *et al.*; 2010, also add electoral popularity). Trowler (2003) concludes by suggesting that the exogenous and endogenous machinations involved in policy making will often be more instrumental in the formation of policy than rational engagement with the available evidence.

Realisation may also be a function of how working with or for policy-makers is perceived by researchers. Council for Science and Technology (2008) argues that of fundamental significance is how an academic is viewed by his or her peers and the risk to their reputation of being branded a 'policy advocate' (Kirst, 2000). This is especially true if the work of researchers is misapplied or misrepresented or if policy decisions lead to researchers losing control of how their ideas are interpreted and implemented (Edwards *et al.*, 2007). Winch (2001) provides further detail by presenting a number of 'dangers' faced by researchers when undertaking studies on behalf of government. Such dangers include researchers compromising their values by only asking the questions policy-makers want answered or by only providing the answers they think their audience wants to hear (in order to maximize their prestige and be invited to undertake such work again); or to come up with 'quick fixes' because policy-makers have provided unfeasible timescales within which research must be undertaken and reported. Thus, producing or being seen to produce research that is designed to help develop policy may not always be viewed as a valuable or beneficial endeavor by academic peers.

Whilst the arguments briefly outlined above do provide initial steers for why evidence-informed policy may not always come to fruition, they may also be regarded as representing surface level manifestations of much deeper issues. These include

notions of whether evidence impacts on policy in a 'conceptual', 'symbolic' or 'instrumental' way and epistemological differences between academic researchers and policy-makers in terms of what counts as knowledge and what knowledge can be used for (Davies, 2007; Sebba, 2007). In addition, it has been suggested that political principals or factors shape what are seen by policy-makers as valid subject areas for research (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Ball, 2007, 2008). Finally, it is noted that an imbalance in power relations between academics and those responsible for policy, maintains the ideological and epistemological positions held by policy-makers and problematises alternative points of view (Foucault, 1980; Lister, 2000). As such, I contend that these concepts have a fundamental impact on how 'evidence-informed' can be conceptualised or what the term means in practice. I now explore these fundamental issues in more detail, beginning with an analysis of the impact evidence might have on the policy making process.

## **2.2 – What impact might evidence have on policy?**

Rickinson *et al.* (2011) note that there is little empirical research as to how evidence might impact upon educational policy making. The subject has been explored by a number of authors operating within the field of 'knowledge exchange', however.

Machlup (1993: 449-450), for example, suggests a number of possible impact levels:

- (i) receiving it [the information] and thus getting a chance to read it; (ii) receiving and actually reading it; (iii) receiving, reading, and understanding it; (iv) receiving, reading, understanding, and appreciating it; (v) receiving, reading, understanding, appreciating, and making it the basis of a decision; or (vi) receiving, reading, understanding, and appreciating it, plus letting it help you in making a decision and taking an action (or refusing to act) in line with the decision reached with the help of the knowledge obtained.

At the same time, a differentiation has been made between the 'conceptual' use of knowledge; defined by Huberman (1992: 6) as "changes in levels of knowledge, understanding, or attitude" and 'instrumental' uses of knowledge; which relate to "changes in behavior and practice". In addition is Weiss's (1979, 1982) notion of the symbolic use of research: research used to justify an existing decision.

Weiss (1982) contends that research rarely provides immediate answers to policy issues and instead works to influence policy via policy-makers' conceptualizations of

issues. Rigby (2005) concurs, noting that research dissemination cannot be responsible for direct action on the part of policy-makers, and is only likely to have an impact on trends, fads, arguments and propositions in the longer term. Rigby's reference to a longer term time scale is reinforced by Levin (2008) who notes that some of the most powerful examples of evidence-informed policy, such as England's smoking ban (implemented in 2007), have taken decades to evolve and implement. Weiss (1980, 1982) concludes by suggesting that research will only impact on the way policy-makers view the world after a period of knowledge 'creep' or 'percolation' and notes that, in part, this may be due to the diffuse nature of policy making. The elongated timescales involved with assessing impact are also reflected in proposals for the Research Excellence Framework (the proposed replacement for the Research Assessment Exercise for 2014): the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), following the evaluation of the pilot exercise to assess impact, have recommended that "impacts from research typically develop over extended periods of time...[and that] institutions should be permitted to submit impacts that evolve over long time frames to successive REF exercises" (2010: 3). HEFCE conclude that a timeframe of up to 15 years between the commencement of the research and associated impact may be viewed as "broadly appropriate" (2010: 5).

Weiss's (1982, 1998) concept of knowledge 'percolation' indicates that, whilst desirable, the occurrence of instrumental knowledge use in the short term will be rarely achievable<sup>12</sup>. Weiss's arguments are confirmed by the findings of Landry *et al.* (2001) who, in a survey of Canadian social scientists, found that only 12 per cent felt that their research findings had directly led to a given policy application and only 3 per cent felt that their research findings always led to policy applications. However, as Cooper and Levin (2010) note, the data used by Landry *et al.* is perception based and, as such, is likely to be limited in terms of how much it can actually reveal about impact.

### **2.3 – How might epistemological or ontological perspectives affect the nature of the evidence considered by policy-makers?**

Dunne *et al.* (2005) argue that the processes of engaging with the empirical and of developing accounts of any such engagement will always be shaped by the methodological assumptions that exist within different ways of examining and

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<sup>12</sup> The Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 study undertaken by Taggart *et al.*, 2008, provides one concrete example of instrumental knowledge use (See: Appendix E, p. 240). Others may also be found in Annex 2 of Government Office for Science (2010).

representing social reality. Thus, our ontological views on the nature of the social world and our epistemological beliefs about what we can know and say about it, affect the way research is conducted and, importantly how research is interpreted or received by its audience.

The emergence and broad acceptance of interpretivism (which argues that the social world and the self are constructed through processes of interaction and interpretation: Hammersley, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Charmaz, 2006; Gibson, 2008a), as an epistemological alternative to positivism (which posits the existence of objective reality and facts, which can be known or approximated: Roth and Mehta, 2002), has led Dunne *et al.* (2005: 15) to claim that positivism is now incompatible with a “relativised and globalised world”. Paradoxically, however, Dunne *et al.* also maintain that positivism has been subject to somewhat of a rebirth by providing the empirical basis for the ‘what works’ discourse of both the previous New Labour government and the current coalition administration. Dunne *et al.*’s claim is reflected in a number of speeches made by current and past Secretaries of State who have held a responsibility for education policy: the first, by David Blunkett (then Secretary of State for Education and Employment) in 2000, was made as part of an announcement of major developments in the Government’s education research policy. Specifically, Blunkett (2000: 21) called for: “Social scientists to help to determine what works and why, and what types of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective”. Nine years later Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, noted in the foreword of the DCSF’s *Analysis and Evidence Strategy* for 2009-10 that:

Evidence and analysis continues to be fundamental in... identifying which policies are working and which could work better... [in] strengthening our understanding of what drives outcomes for different groups, and identifying how we can improve those outcomes (2009: 5).

For the current coalition government Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, stated in a speech to the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services<sup>13</sup> that:

I want to see more data generated by the profession to show what works, clearer

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<sup>13</sup> See:

[http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/events/conference2010/annual\\_conference\\_2010\\_videos/annual-conference-2010-michael-gove-2.htm](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/index/events/conference2010/annual_conference_2010_videos/annual-conference-2010-michael-gove-2.htm)

information about teaching techniques that get results, more rigorous, scientifically-robust research about pedagogies which succeed and proper independent evaluations of interventions which have run their course. We need more evidence-based policy making, and for that to work we need more evidence (June 2010).

In addition to their contention that evidence-informed approaches are necessarily positivist in nature, Dunne *et al.* (2005) also maintain that there has been a conflation of realist ontology and epistemology by policy-makers. This argument has been formed through taking Elliott's (1991: 19) view that, in conjunction with an emergent culture of positivism, there has also been a "widespread emergence of fundamentalism... evident in most of the 'reforms' now sweeping our social institutions"<sup>14</sup>. In terms of education such reforms have included New Labour's attempts to raise standards, increase diversity and choice and increase the accountability of teachers (Mortimore, 2000). In addition, Ball (1997) adds the concepts of new managerialism, motivating social actors both to produce and strive for excellence (and quality) and the development of a culture of self-interest. Dunne *et al.* (2005) suggest that such dogmatic reforms create an implicit unquestionable political philosophy which forms the basis of an ontological perspective and so drives the epistemological requirements for evidence. That is, requirements for evidence that details 'what works' to improve the existing, ideologically perceived, situation. This resultant ontology has been described by Scott (2000) as 'naïve realism'.

A more detailed analysis of the epistemological and ontological issues associated with evidence-informed policy making may be found at Appendix A (p. 223). For the purpose of this section, however, I note that politicians are driven by ideology (Perry *et al.*, 2010), and policy making, by its very nature, depends on the ability of government to make decisions which, when implemented, have material effects on the lives of its citizens. As such, politicians and policy-makers are likely to adopt ontological perspectives which have, as their basis, social actors responding to stimulus in broadly predictable ways (based on established social norms) and which are both stable and empirically observable. As Dunne *et al.* suggest, "we can assume the world we live in is pretty much the world that our neighbours inhabit" (2005: 19). Government departments/policy-makers are also likely to seek out research findings that may be

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<sup>14</sup> Counter arguments here include the notion that Dunne *et al.*'s critique in itself is realist in nature and that the 'fundamentalist' reforms posited by Elliott are no more fundamentalist than the alternatives posed by their critics.



generalized in order to help them develop or inform policies (Perry *et al.*, 2010). In other words, to request findings that might be applicable nationwide and which do not simply relate to the empirical situation from which they were derived.

Simultaneously, I contend that for policy-makers to be able to use a broad range of research effectively, they must come to realise and accept that conclusions will always be tentative and uncertain. That is to say, more akin to the 'fuzzy' generalizations associated with Bassey (1999) than to the cause and effect associations noted by Giddens (1974). As a start, embracing a hybrid of multiple methodological approaches will allow those in government to begin to appreciate 'why' something works, which is as of much importance as knowing 'what works'. But policy-makers may have to progress further: to understand the limitations of different forms of knowledge or to challenge taken-for-granted paradigms and acknowledge the complex constructivist nature of the social world. These views are shared by Cooper *et al.* (2009: 3) who note that:

It is virtually impossible for a reasonable person to disagree with the idea that policy and practice should be based on the best available evidence... The critics' real objections are not to the use of evidence itself, but to particular ways in which evidence is being defined or used.

This is no small task or shift in mentality however and is impacted upon by the notion that policy-makers' choice of preferred epistemologies also relate to conceptualisations of power and discursive dominance. This is discussed in more detail below.

## **2.4 – The impacts of power, ideology and discursive dominance on the subject for research and the research approach**

Ball (1994) argues that discourse does not simply represent reality, but helps create it. In doing so, Ball situates his analysis within a long established tradition of both structuralist and post-structuralist theorists, such as Saussure and Levi-Strauss, who have considered the significance of discourse and who equate it directly to power. In discussing the 'regime of truth', for example, Foucault (1980) observes that the dissemination of discourse as part of the 'will to knowledge' represents a form of control over what may be seen or perceived as true. As a consequence, within the 'regime of truth' discursive types are not only accepted as true, but are also made to

function as true. At the same time, Foucault argues that individual identities are shaped as a result of their engagement with the dominant discourses of their environment. Power, according to Foucault, thus forms an inherent part of all discursive exchanges (Foucault's conceptualisations of knowledge, power and discourse are set out in detail in Appendix B; p. 231). Fairclough (1995: 1) argues that power is conceptualized "both in terms of asymmetries between participants in discourse events, and in terms of unequal capacity to control how texts [sic] are produced, distributed and consumed (and hence the shape of texts) in particular sociological contexts". Thus, as van Dijk (1996: 86) contends: "measures of discourse access may be rather faithful indicators of the power of social groups".

A number of scholars have used the work of seminal theorists such as Foucault and Saussure to develop conceptual frameworks through which the effects and impacts of discursive control and discursive dominance may be critically examined. Fairclough, for example, is the architect of Critical Discourse Analysis; which was conceptualised to analyse how everyday or common sense understandings, which can be viewed as ideological, are 'naturalized' or taken for granted. In doing so, Fairclough (1995) notes that ideology is synonymous with the term 'world-view' and argues that all groups have a particular ideology that corresponds to their collective issues, interests or position: as such, at any one time some ideologies will be more dominant, prevalent or widely accepted than others. Thus, as Fairclough observes, the power to control discourse and discursive events or practices is therefore regarded as the ability to continually employ any given political philosophy or set of beliefs over alternatives. This directly corresponds to Foucault's 'regime of truth' which may, therefore, be considered ideological in nature. In a similar vein, Ball's (2007, 2008: 5) concept of 'critical policy sociology' attends to the language of policy, in particular its rhetorical mechanics and its main use of discourse. Ball argues that this is done "not in terms of a focus on language for its own sake but rather as a way of seeing how policy discourses work to privilege certain ideas and topics and speakers and exclude others". It is Ball's contention that policy discourse creates its own rationale which moves to make sets of ideas commonsensical and 'true' whilst providing 'reasonable' or 'sensible' ways of thinking and talking about policies.

Notions as to the recent prevailing political philosophy affecting the development of education policy have been hypothesised by, amongst others, Ball (2007). Here, building upon the work of Jessop (2002), he argues that the replacement of the 'Keynsian National Welfare State' with the 'Schumpeterian Workfare State', that is the

demise of Keynesian economics and the rise of the perceived power of the market, has occurred alongside a corresponding shift in discourse surrounding the purposes of education and education policy. Correspondingly, Ball (2008: 1) contends that:

Education is now seen as a crucial factor in ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness in the context of “Informational capitalism”. In other words, education policy is increasingly thought about and made within the “pressures” and requirements of globalisation.

Ball's view is shared by Stronach and MacLure (1997) who suggest that educational change in the UK has been characterised by waves of reform along with a discursive formation that connects education to the future of the economy. As a consequence, Ball (2008) maintains that the ideas of transformation, enterprise, modernization, innovation, creativity, competition and dynamism have been key signifiers of educational reform.

Lister (2000), invoking the ‘will to knowledge’, claims that political discourses such as those outlined by Ball or Stronach and MacLure are invariably presented in ways that make those who oppose them seem ‘old fashioned’ or even ‘backwards looking’. This process has been described by Fairclough (2000) as offering ‘impossible alternatives’. I contend, therefore, that the ability for researchers to be able to influence or introduce new ideas or challenge into the policy making process will be affected by the existence of discursive control (I perceive this to shaped by policy-makers, although policy-makers could also be subject to the same discourses), directed at promoting given or preferred political philosophies: if academics wish to influence policy, they will need to ensure that their research topics and narratives are compatible with the current dominant political philosophy/ideology and/or ideas that are currently privileged, or risk their work being excluded from the policy development process.

Policy-makers also use discourse to promote preferred epistemologies. Scott (2000: 14), for example, notes that “epistemology is [also] subject to the prevailing power arrangements in society”. The use of discourse to privilege certain epistemologies may be illustrated by MacLure's (2005) consideration of the use of systematic reviews, a methodological approach often favoured by policy-makers seeking to understand ‘what works’. Here MacLure (2005: 394) claims that the discourse of the systematic review is driven by transparency and the culture of audits and that: “the assumption appears to be that evidence, once it has been filtered out of the source texts and checked for

quality, should be able to speak for itself". As such MacLure argues that systematic reviewing degrades what academia is best at, namely the intellectual acts of analysis, argument and interpretation and replaces them with a discursive lexicon favouring simple scanning, synthesis and summary. Thus, by imposing strict controls on exactly how data are to be extracted and aggregated, MacLure maintains that systematic reviews serve only to incapacitate academics and dumb down their intellectual capacity. By using a discourse which calls for clarity, MacLure (2005: 395) argues that both those engaged in systematic reviews and the policy-makers who embrace them, are suggesting that other forms of research are both "unscientific and shady. Calls for clarity, as several critics have noted, are never innocent". Discourse according to MacLure, is therefore used to perpetuate distrust against methods or approaches that are neither systematic nor positivistic in nature (such as qualitative methodologies).

Oakley, however, describes the critiques of systematic reviews postulated by MacLure and others<sup>15</sup> as 'resistance texts' and contends that those who put forward such views "have simply not attended to the evidence that [systematic reviews] are practical, feasible, ethical and useful in yielding information to guide those who design, provide and use educational services" (2006: 64). Instead, Oakley argues that the reasons put forward for resisting the adoption of new 'technologies' of evaluation are sociological in nature and can best be understood as responses to perceived 'threats' to the livelihood or business of educational researchers. Chief amongst these threats, Oakley maintains, is that systematic reviews reveal (through the lack of inclusion of studies in reviews) that educational research is often non-cumulative in nature, poorly focused and reported and can be based on inadequate or inappropriate methodological design. Conclusions previously reached by both Hillage *et al.* and Ofsted in 1998. In this case, however, Oakley reaches her conclusion by looking at the 'weight of evidence' scores (i.e. scores related to the soundness and appropriateness of method) given to individual studies by researchers systematically reviewing evidence and applying their professional judgement as to how studies were undertaken. In developing inclusion criteria in this way, systematic reviewing techniques may thus be seen as drivers of the quality of both research and policy-making. The former by setting the bar for the quality of the methods (both qualitative and quantitative) that should be employed by researchers; the latter by ensuring that policy-makers are only presented with the highest quality evidence.

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<sup>15</sup> Oakley also identifies the work of Atkinson (2000), Ball (2001) and Hammersley (1997, 2004) as 'resistance texts'.

Pawson (2006) too rebuts claims that systematic reviews will favour positivistic methods over approaches that may offer more interpretative insights. At the same time, however, Pawson puts forward the notion that we should question the value qualitative syntheses add to systematic reviews and the role that qualitative research plays within the systematic review process. In doing so, he contends that 'fragments' of evidence rather than whole studies provide an appropriate unit of analysis for any qualitative syntheses and only those fragments that will be employed should need to be defensible in terms of their quality: in other words, only parts of any given qualitative study should be used and that the quality of whole qualitative studies should not be judged. Pawson also suggests that qualitative studies should not be filtered out at the beginning of any systematic review, instead the reviewer should ask whether a particular study helps to refine the explanation or understanding of the intervention or phenomenon the systematic review is seeking to address, at points in time where such studies might provide greater insight.

However, in proposing to alter the appropriate unit of analysis and so how the quality of qualitative research might best be determined, Pawson's approach fails to reflect that, if a study suffers from a lack of methodological rigour, fragments of evidence may potentially be flawed and insight a hostage to fortune. For example, Pawson states from a 'realist' perspective that systematic reviews serve to test the theories and assumptions underpinning particular interventions. Where qualitative research provides some indication of cause and affect that may aid this process, if the study is analytically flawed, such insight may in fact be attributable to other factors not described or accounted for by the study in question. That is, evidential fragments may provide conclusions that only coincidentally correspond with the chain of logic the researcher is trying to establish or may be selected by the researcher because they correspond to a point of view or set of values that they are trying to determine, rather than provide any meaningful snapshot into the workings of the social.

In considering the perspectives of MacLure, Oakley and Pawson, it is my argument that the discourses employed by policy-makers and observed by MacLure stem from the notion that policies informed by the concrete and 'law-like' generalisations that systematic reviews (or other 'what works' approaches) are perceived to provide are likely to be less problematic to advance than those which are based on evidence that is cautious or subject to caveat or warning. In other words, it is the belief of policy-makers

that only policies and policy discourse which appear to be based upon firm foundations are likely to be successful in upholding a particular 'regime of truth'. This does not mean that qualitative approaches are necessarily rejected by policy-makers but that, for them to be accepted, qualitative outputs must be directed at providing an understanding, or an augmentation, of existing knowledge as to 'what works'. An example of how qualitative research has been used in this way stems from Cummings *et al.*'s (2004) evaluation of extended schools. This project was funded by the DfES and involved case studies of a number of pathfinder schools; the purpose of such case studies being to determine the impact extended services had on outcomes for pupils and so what might work for the extended schools programme moving forward..

The combination of discursive dominance over both epistemology and ideology results in policy-makers framing what might be seen as valid areas for empirical exploration, and valid approaches to developing an understanding of the empirical (Levitas, 2005)<sup>16</sup>. This can be illustrated by examining the role of government commissioned research in the policy making process. The DCSF's *Analysis and Evidence Strategy* for 2009-10, for example, notes that the role of social research within the Department is to: "build the evidence base on our [current] policy issues" (2009: 15). Likewise, in 2007, the Eurydice Network was commissioned by the European Commission to provide an overview of the usefulness of evidence for policymaking and practice in member states. In their report, the Network's researchers suggest that the DfES's analytical priorities may be viewed as falling along a continuum. At one end, much of the Department's work may be characterised as evaluating or assessing the effectiveness of existing programmes. At the other end of the continuum sits research designed to generate insight to support the effective formulation of existing policy ideas. Exley (2008) has expanded upon this vista to contend that government commissioned research will typically be applied in nature and heavily linked to solving problems rather than providing challenge to the nature or status quo of a given policy programme, while Hillage *et al.* (1998) note that policy-makers have expressed a clear desire for research to feature more prominently in the 'justification' of policy initiatives.

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<sup>16</sup> The impacts of discursive control also manifest themselves on the production of evidence in a myriad of other ways: Strathern (2000) argues that the process of audit, leads to a situation where academics respond by changing their discourse, behaviour and activity to match that required; Stronach and MacLure (1997) suggest that the discursive spaces of educational research are moulded by the demands of managerialism and performativity, citing processes such as the Research Assessment Exercise; Nowotny *et al.* (2003), meanwhile, maintain that the research process has been subject to a new language of production, which pushes to the forefront concepts such as 'application,' 'contextualisation', 'relevance' and 'transfer'.

As a result, I argue that research commissioned by the Department for Education will be designed to shape or evaluate pre-conceived or existing policy, rather than encourage 'blue skies' thinking or seriously to challenge policy direction. In addition, since commissioned research within the DfE is "scrutinised by our Research Approvals Committee to ensure that the scale, timing and broad methodology are appropriate" (2009: 15), epistemological factors associated with preferred method or approach will have been determined and accounted for by government researchers when scoping and designing the specification for the study. Court and Young (2003) and Nutley *et al.* (2007) note that, as a result of such commissioned research directly meeting the political needs and epistemological preferences of policy-makers, the foundations are in place for policy-makers to consider any findings that arise.

The resulting situation has been described as one of 'policy-based evidence' (Banks, 2009; Locke, 2009; Sanderson, 2010) and reflects Weiss's (1979, 1982) notion of the 'symbolic' use of research. The policy-based evidence approach is not unique to England and Wales; Banks (2009), for example, describes the use of commissioned evidence in Australian (Federal) policy making as aiding the government's ability to implement its national reforms. Cohn (2006) notes that in Canada, government seeks out research which is relevant to its overall policy-making context. In the USA, however, the situation would appear to be less favourable to evidence as a whole, with Schaps (2008) conjectures that: "when they are used at all, research findings serve more often as a cloak of respectability for policy decisions made for other reasons, rather than a genuine guide to action".

I now conclude my analysis of the wider context within which this thesis is situated by examining the notion of 'Mode 2' knowledge and the existing models that conceptualise the process of knowledge adoption. Further detail and definitions of the concepts of research, and evidence, and the types of evidence that policy-makers may consider when developing policy can be found at Appendix C (p. 234).

## **2.5 – 'Mode 2' knowledge and the agora: changing perspectives of knowledge and of those who might influence policy development**

Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) use the concept of 'Mode 2' to highlight changing trends in the production of knowledge. In particular they suggest a

shift from traditional academic disciplinary based linear modes of production, where uses are made of knowledge which is transferred once it has been produced ('Mode 1') to one where knowledge is generated in a context of application. In other words, they argue that 'Mode 2' knowledge is designed to be applied to particular problems right from the beginning of the research process. In terms of evidence-informed policy making in education, therefore, 'Mode 2' knowledge production would see research projects designed to meet particular needs or deficits in the education system in order that policy-makers might be able to act upon them (such projects could, however, be instigated by policy-makers or researchers alike).

As noted in section 2.1 (p. 13 and further detailed in Appendix C; p. 234), I regard the concepts of evidence, 'Mode 2' knowledge and research findings as synonymous. In their conceptualisation of 'Mode 2', however, Gibbons *et al.* (1994), Gibbons (1999) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) also introduce a number of additional ideas that I have subsequently employed within this thesis and which I apply in combination with my wider definition of evidence. The first of these is the notion of a widening participation by those outside of academia in the production of knowledge designed for policy-makers. This occurs in two ways: improvements in communication technology, which result in a breakdown of existing and ordered hierarchies between academic and non academic 'knowledge'. In terms of this thesis, this is seen as allowing non-academic 'research' organisations (such as think tanks) to quickly and easily publish and market their work, speedily bringing it to the attention of decision makers. Secondly, that the validity of any knowledge produced may, in part, be determined by its users; this is referred to as the 'social robustness' of knowledge. Gibbons (1999) suggests that 'socially robust' knowledge is that which has not simply originated from good quality research, but that is also likely to be understood and accepted by society. I argue, therefore, that as a result policy-makers may consider that a wider and diverse range of knowledge/research findings or evidence, in addition to that produced by academics, is actually suitable in meeting their needs. This argument is also reflected in Rickinson *et al.* (2011) who suggest that policy-makers view research colloquially and so define evidence by relevance. Whilst the work of Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) is not empirically based, studies show that policy-makers do actively consider and take on board a much wider spectrum of knowledge than that produced by academic researchers alone (for example, see Brown, 2009).

In addition to the concept of 'Mode 2', Nowotny *et al.* (2003) and Gibbons (1999) also highlight the importance of the concept of the 'agora' or the market place in which



'Mode 2' knowledge is both produced and 'traded'. I consider the agora to be an important concept for this thesis since it represents a space where policy-makers/policy making organisations can set out their stall, framing the research priorities which matter to them. Also within the agora sit numerous evidence 'experts', both academic and non-academic, with whom policy-makers might engage to help find solutions to such problems. As will be discussed later, the agora is shaped by the current ideologies and epistemologies favoured by those who control the discursive environment at any given point in time (i.e. those in power). This, as a result, serves to specify the evidence which might feasibly sit within the agora. Gibbons (1999) also suggests, however, that the agora now represents a space where the communication of knowledge plays a dominant role. Thus the agora contains competing strategies for the communication of knowledge. Whilst primarily concerned with academic evidence, it will also be useful for this thesis to consider other 'socially robust' evidence produced by non-academic actors operating within the agora (e.g. that produced by think tanks). If such evidence is successful in reaching policy-makers then it should be the concern of this thesis to try and determine what can be learned from the communication strategies employed by such knowledge producers.

## **2.6 – How policy is developed and conceptualisations of how knowledge 'moves' between policy-makers and knowledge suppliers**

Whilst I refer to those actors involved in the policy development process as 'policy makers', it is not assumed that this group is homogenous in nature: different policy actors will be responsible for the myriad of policy processes that are constantly in effect and which range from instigation to enactment. In particular, I distinguish between politicians and civil servants. I define the former as policy makers who have been elected to pursue a particular policy mandate, whilst the permanent civil service are regarded as those charged with delivering that mandate. Policy ideas may originate from either group: politicians will develop political manifestos or pre-election commitments and will also react to specific events. As noted by Perry *et al.* (2010) civil servants too will instigate solutions or ideas and present these to Ministers, often when politicians require specific assistance with regards to a given issue or situation. The nature of the policy proposals developed by civil servants will, however, invariably be shaped by the current political ideology and/or direction of policy travel. In other words, the policy solutions developed by civil servants will sit within the realm of what is generally perceived to be politically acceptable at any given point in time.

A more detailed exploration of the policy development process may be found at Appendix D (p. 238). In summary, however, the diffuse nature of policy making has led many to regard the creation and formation of policy as extraordinarily complex, and the evolution of individual policies as heavily dependent upon a multitude of interwoven, 'messy' factors (e.g. see Weiss, 1980; 1982; Trowler, 2003; Davies, 2004; Gough, 2004; Lavis, 2006; Ball, 2008; Perry *et al.*, 2010). Such factors are likely to include: who the initial instigator of the policy was and who was involved in key decisions along the way, the causes which led to this instigation, the expediency with which the policy had to be implemented, extant opinions held by the public and/or media and prevailing economic and social conditions (and also of the factors described in section 2.1; p. 13, e.g. see Pestieau, 2003; Trowler, 2003; Davies, 2004; Gough, 2004; Lavis, 2006; Perry *et al.*, 2010).

Consequently, this level of complexity engenders any understanding of how and when evidence has actually been used within the decision process, or the extent or nature of this use, extremely difficult. This is because the extent or proportion of the policy decision that might be attributable to the evidence in question; the extent to which such use respects the fidelity of the research; when in the process evidence was considered and so on, can only be gained retrospectively rather than determined in advance. It is also recognised that the impact of research outputs on policy development may be manifold and are likely to range in nature from actual use; where tangible change occurs on the back of research findings, to one of 'enlightenment'; where outputs serve to enhance or add to users' perspectives on a given issue. As detailed above, these impacts have been defined by Weiss: 1979, 1982; as the 'instrumental' and 'conceptual' uses of research, respectively. Despite these complexities, it is argued that there are a number of key points at which research can help with the decision-making process: for instance, by aiding the identification of a problem, by helping to create, form or steer the public agenda or by aiding (or inspiring) policy directorates in the development of their initiatives (Nutley *et al.*, 2007; Perry *et al.*, 2010). The means through which researchers might capitalise upon these opportunities have been conceptualised via a number of models, sitting within the theoretical field of knowledge exchange, which attempt to explain the process through which the adoption of evidence by policy-makers occurs.

The genealogy of the models illustrates that the perceived drivers of knowledge adoption have evolved over time: Mitton *et al.* (2007), for example, argue that the

concept of 'knowledge transfer' dominated during the 1980s and 90s. This led early explanations of adoption, for instance the *Demand Pull Model* (Weiss, 1979; Yin and Moore, 1988; Rich, 1991), to focus on one-way transfers or pushes of knowledge from researchers to (passive) policy-makers. Specifically, the *Demand Pull Model* argued that adoption occurs when policy-makers act like customers who define what they want and where academic researchers meet those demands through the contracted provision of research. Thus, with the *Demand Pull Model*, knowledge adoption is conceptualized as being driven solely by the needs of knowledge users and research purely designed to solve given and particular problems. After its initial development the notion of *Demand Pull* was augmented by that of *Producer Push* (Lavis *et al.*, 2003), highlighting the growing perception that active efforts on the part of researchers were also required in order to inform decision-making. Knowledge adoption thus also came to be viewed as a function of researcher engagement with potential audiences and how accessible research messages were made to these audiences (i.e. the extent to which research is 'pushed' to users).

The notion that pull and push alone could account for the adoption of knowledge was problematised, however, both by the conceptualisation of the *Enlightenment Model* (Weiss, 1998) and through the development of the *Two Communities Model* (Amara *et al.*, 2004). Within the *Enlightenment Model*, for example, knowledge adoption was conceived, not as a consequence of the findings of a single study or a body of knowledge, but from the percolation of evidence into the policy making domain, causing policy-makers to think differently about particular issues over a period of time. The *Two Communities Model*, meanwhile, assumed that a cultural gap exists between policy-makers and practitioners on one hand, and academic researchers on the other. As a consequence, the model advanced the notion that a lack of understanding exists between these 'two communities', leading to low levels of communication (and so knowledge adoption) between them.

Mitton *et al.* (2007) observe that, as a result of the issues raised by both the *Enlightenment* and *Two Communities Models*, later conceptualisations of knowledge adoption were grounded in the idea that the successful adoption of knowledge requires lengthy interaction rather than one-way conversation. Likewise, Nutley *et al.* (2007) posit that the findings of research do not 'speak for themselves', they are interpreted and that this happens best through dialogue and engagement. As a result, models such as the *Interaction/Communication and Feedback Model* (Dunn, 1980; Yin and Moore, 1988; Nyden and Wiewel, 1992; Oh, 1997; Nutley *et al.*, 2002; Amara, *et al.*,

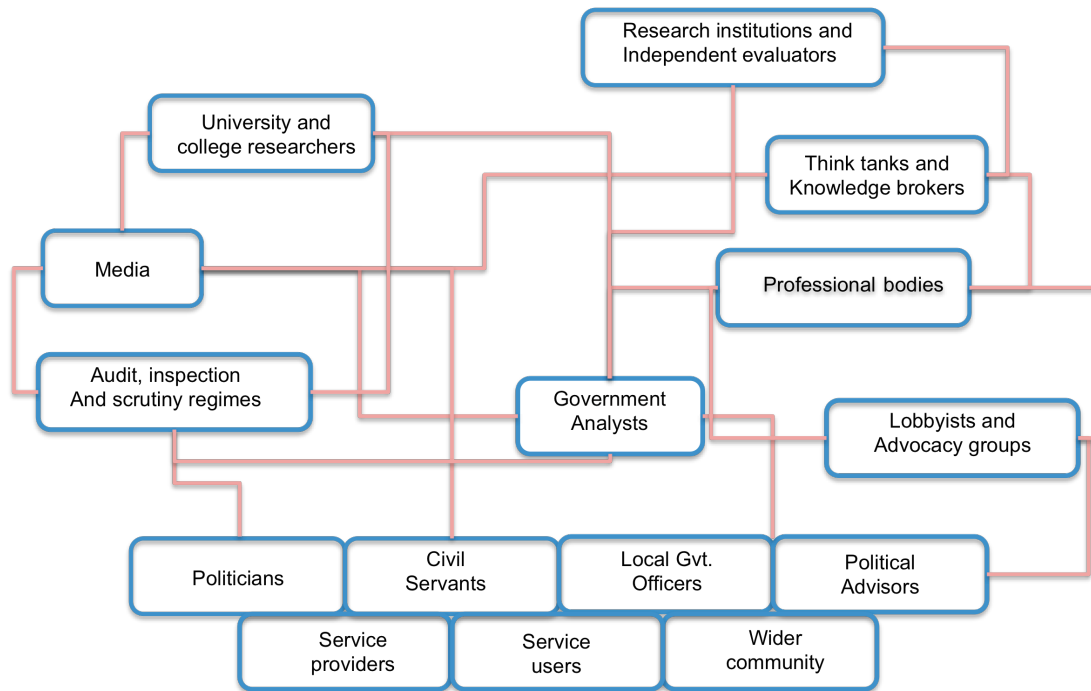
2004) and the *Linkage and Exchange Model* (Lavis *et al.*, 2006) were developed to explain knowledge adoption as a dynamic, two way process.

*Interaction/Communication...*, for example, focuses on the role of linkages between users and researchers and suggests that knowledge adoption depends on non-linear (i.e. 'messy', iterative) interaction between these two groups. The *Linkage and Exchange Model*, meanwhile, suggests knowledge adoption is dependent upon partnerships, with both researchers and users collaborating to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. Partnerships may vary in duration, may occur at any point in the research or policy process and may include activities such as priority-setting exercises or collaborative research projects. Knowledge brokers may also play a key role in establishing such partnerships.

At the same time other co-dependent or complementary models, developed in parallel, began to focus on individual aspects of the adoption process. For instance, the *Organizational Interests Model* (Amara *et al.*, 2004) frames the argument that the size of organisations, their structures, the nature of their responsibilities and their needs may affect the propensity of professionals working within them to adopt and utilise or underutilise research. The *Engineering Model* (Amara *et al.*, 2004) suggests that the effective adoption of research depends on the characteristics of the research findings. These include content attributes (such as compatibility, complexity, observability, trialability, validity, reliability applicability etc) and the type of research (basic-theoretical/applied, general/abstract, quantitative/qualitative, particular/concrete, and research domains and disciplines).

Rickinson *et al.* (2011: 80), reporting on the seminar series they held on user engagement, outline a model of knowledge adoption proposed at the seminars by Nutley. This is depicted below, and identifies policy-makers as politicians, civil servants and political advisors. It also proposes a range of both intermediaries and brokers through which research findings are translated before reaching those policy-makers. This, Rickinson *et al.* note, means that any translation is also filtered through or slanted by the perspectives of those involved and so made sympathetic to their particular viewpoint(s).

**Figure i: A model of knowledge adoption proposed by Nutley (cited by Rickinson *et al.*, 2011)**



**Key:** Figure i illustrates Nutley's proposal for how knowledge flows between research providers and research users, whilst also highlighting the intermediaries and other social actors who have a role in this process. The lines in the diagram represent a two-way flow of information; that is, the model also demonstrates the routes through which knowledge requests from users (or potential users) might reach knowledge providers in order for them to be acted upon.

The explanatory power of a number of these models was tested empirically by Landry *et al.* (2003) in a survey of 833 Canadian government officials. Landry *et al.* concluded that whilst more interactive factors appear to explain research adoption best<sup>17</sup> overall, the process is far more complex than these existing models might suggest. Estabrooks *et al.* too argue that there is currently no satisfactory over-arching theory to explain

<sup>17</sup> Empirical analysis by Landry *et al.* (2003) indicates that the drivers of research adoption put forward by the *Two Communities Model* do seem to provide effective indicators as to whether knowledge will be adopted by policy-makers. Likewise the *Interaction/Communication and Feedback Model* successfully explain some of the key drivers involved in research adoption. Landry *et al.* suggest, however, that the determinants of research adoption, as postulated by The *Organizational Interests Model*, are mixed in terms of how well they predict whether research will successfully be adopted by policy-makers and that factors postulated by the *Engineering Model* fail to effectively explain the processes involved in the successful adoption of research.

effective research adoption, with most models tending to focus on “explanation rather than prescription” (2006: 26). In other words, while studies may explain what happens, they fail to postulate why or what specific actions should be undertaken by social actors as a result. These sentiments echo the work of Wingens (1990), who describes the explanatory power of knowledge adoption models as ‘mediocre’ while Cooper *et al.* (2009) argue that they are conceptually inadequate and fail to reflect the idea that knowledge use is a social process. Finally, Mitton *et al.* (2007: 756) note that “there is very little evidence that can adequately inform what [knowledge adoption] strategies work in what contexts”.

It is suggested, therefore, that there is a need to strengthen the conceptual basis underpinning how knowledge adoption is currently envisaged and that this should be undertaken in a number of key areas. First, it is my contention that all activity relating to knowledge adoption comprises a ‘what’; a goal or purpose that actors are working towards. As such there must be a ‘how’ (empirically observable actions social actors are engaged in and which are directed towards achieving the ‘what’) and a ‘why’ (the underlying factors that drive the ‘how’ in pursuit of the ‘what’: why do people engage in the specific actions they do when seeking to address the ‘what’). In addition, because it relates to the motivations of (or what drives) social actors, I view the ‘why’ as sociological in nature; it may therefore be accounted for by migrating an appropriate existing theory (or theories) of social behaviour/social action to the phenomenon of knowledge adoption (or could possibly be explained through the development of new sociological theory).

In applying these contentions to existing models of knowledge adoption, it is clear that they often relate the ‘how’ to the ‘what’ but do not consider the ‘why’. For example, taking the *Demand Pull Model* (which describes a ‘what’), the sociological ‘why’ would determine the specific actions that might be taken by policy makers and knowledge suppliers (the ‘how’) when seeking to solve given problems. With the *Interaction/Communication and Feedback Model*, interaction can be considered a ‘how’; here the ‘why’ would account for the reasons social actors interact and provide an understanding of what interaction is symptomatic of more generally. Interaction, for example, is likely to be just one manifestation of a number of types or families of actions, all directed towards achieving a desirable outcome or goal. Likewise seeking to solve a problem (the ‘what’ of the *Demand Pull Model*) might be one of many ways of instigating those actions. As well as omitting the ‘why’, these models also omit to

detail the societal factors that affect or shape the nature of the actions that occur as a result of the 'why'. Because of this, I argue that these models and the work surrounding them fail to offer a conceptual framework that provides an effective sociological explanation for the occurrence of knowledge adoption.

This absence of sociological theory to account for the 'why' may also explain the conclusions reached by Landry *et al.* (2003): their empirical analysis examined the stated behaviours of actors and then compared this to the workings and attributes of each model (i.e. they looked at the stated 'how' and how this compared to the 'how' predicted by each model). What they did not do was attempt to establish the 'why' that leads to the 'how': as such Landry *et al.* had no theoretical toolkit to explain any deviation from the predictions made by these models and so only a limited understanding of how these models could be augmented or improved (hence their conclusion that knowledge adoption is more complex than these models suggest). Conversely, by understanding what drives social actors to behave as they do and what shapes how they act, I maintain that we may begin to develop models which look at why people are behaving in a particular way and consequently predict or account for the actions that are undertaken as a result.

A second area for improvement is that current models do not explicitly differentiate between the myriad of analytical levels at which knowledge adoption operates at or is affected: these include that of the individual policy-maker/researcher, of groups or organisations, or at the level of society more broadly. Taking Nutley's conceptualisation of knowledge transfer as set out in figure i above, it is not clear whether references are made to either individual policy-makers or government departments, or to both. The same is also true for the other constituent parts of the model: are references made to individual researchers or universities and are intermediaries conceptualised as organisations or individual policy actors. It is clear, however, that at different analytical levels, very different factors of influence are likely to come into play: these range from the specific actions that might be undertaken by researchers and policy-makers (as individual communicators of, or audiences for research), to issues of power relations. For example, at the level of the individual or group, factors may relate to how much and what type of effort or efforts are required, by whom, how these are best directed and whether there are specific strategies that are required to facilitate knowledge adoption, or that are regarded as more effective than others. In addition such factors may be context dependent and so different knowledge adoption strategies may be required in different situations. At a more macro level, any inequality in power relations/discursive

control between researchers and policy-makers may serve to ensure that certain ideas or social actors are privileged over others, and/or may affect whether equal amounts of effort are required by both researchers and by policy-makers<sup>18</sup>. Thus, by failing to distinguish between levels of analysis in this way, existing models invariably omit to account for the whole gamut of factors that are fundamental to the success of any adoption of knowledge or may not fully identify those social actors, organisations or societal issues that might be responsible for, or contribute towards, these factors.

Finally, whilst not explicit, it would appear that current models of knowledge adoption fail to differentiate between instrumental and conceptual uses of knowledge, that is, they fail to differentiate between the factors that are inherent to policy-makers considering knowledge (their conceptual use of evidence) and those factors which are likely to impact on the actual creation of policy (the instrumental use of evidence). In other words, solely considering conceptual uses of knowledge is likely to lead to researchers developing fundamentally different strategies for knowledge adoption than those that might affect instrumental (or actual use). This notion is discussed in more detail in section 3.6 (p. 80), below.

## **2.7 – Bringing together the factors that provide the broader context for this study**

The factors which provide a wider context for this study have been examined above. In bringing them together, it is concluded that the combined impacts of the ‘what works’ type preferences of policy-makers, the ideologies which guide them and the manifestation of power and discursive dominance, will tend to lead to the development of policy informed solely (if informed at all) by knowledge which investigates the subject areas policy-makers are most interested in, using the methods they prefer (Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Fairclough, 2000; Lister, 2000; Eurydice Network, 2007; Exley, 2008)<sup>19</sup>. Ball (1995) suggests that, as a consequence, the nature and production of academic research can often become subsumed to the needs of policy-makers.

By including in this analysis the notions of ‘Mode 2’ knowledge and the agora it is argued that where the preferred ideologies and epistemologies of policy-makers

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<sup>18</sup> The perceived inequality in effort between these two groups has been defined as the ‘deficit’ model of research and is discussed later within the thesis.

<sup>19</sup> How policy makers might develop an interest in an idea is discussed in section 2.7.1 (p. 39) and in chapter 5 (p. 117)



conjoin, policy ‘agoras’ or market places will be formed (Gibbons, 1999; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003). Agoras are thus regarded as representing the gamut of knowledge and/or ideas that policy-makers are most likely to consider when developing policy. This is because the subject and nature of any knowledge created or ideas postulated are likely to be deemed relevant and credible by those policy-makers and/or the organisations within which they operate (Locke, 2009). Conversely, it is suggested that studies or ideas outside of the agora are more likely to be criticised and/or excluded: Ouimet *et al.* (2009) argue, for example, that if academic research is seen as politically irrelevant, then government departments are unlikely to spend significant resource attempting to engage with its findings. Criticism or exclusion may also relate to the method of research and the type of evidence or suggestions such studies can provide to policy-makers. The agora also contains the totality of the knowledge suppliers that policy-makers will engage with. In conceptualising ‘Mode 2’ knowledge Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) suggest that the composition of this group has, in more recent times, grown beyond those from within academia (the social actors who might conceivably inform policy is described in sub-section 3.3.2; p.69). The proposed nature of this ‘wider’ context for my study is illustrated diagrammatically in figure ii, below.

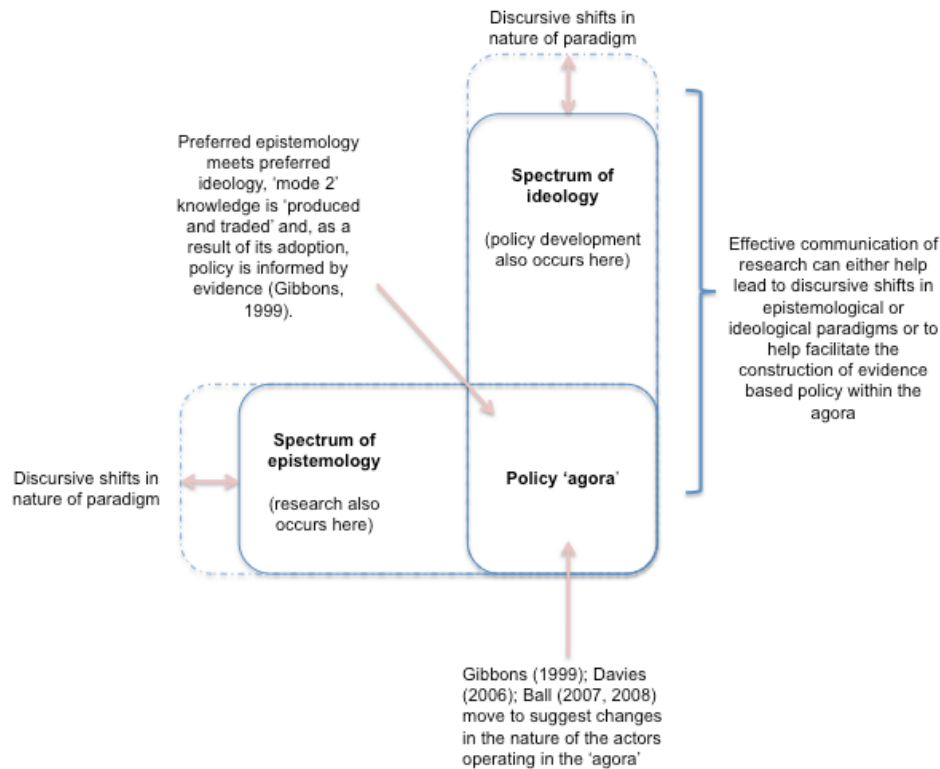
It has been suggested that the ideological paradigm for education favoured by the previous New Labour administration, and so carried forward in policies developed by the DCSF, was defined by the economic concepts of transformation, enterprise, modernization, innovation, creativity, competition, managerialism and dynamism and, ultimately, the linkage between educational and economic performance<sup>20</sup> (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Strathern, 2000; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003; Ball, 1997, 2008). DCSF (2009) also outline the epistemological nature of the evidence that policy-makers are most likely to favour. For 2009-10 this was formulated, firstly, as evidence that illustrates the factors which drive or improve outcomes for different groups; secondly, for studies which evaluate existing policies, identifying which are working and which could work better. Thus, I argue that the most recent and recognisable policy agora was filled with research and ideas designed to help policy-makers determine how to improve educational (and so economic) performance, derived via the identification of ‘what works’ type improvements in educational outcomes for different subgroups of the population. This is not to say that the research within the agora at this time was solely dominated by that utilising a quantitative approach; qualitative techniques were also

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<sup>20</sup> Baker (2010) outlines the ideological paradigm for education favoured by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in the following article:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/may/18/coalition-education-policy-cuts>

used, but they were geared towards providing an understanding of 'what works' (e.g. see Cummings *et al.*, 2004).

**Figure ii: The wider context within which this study is situated**



**Key:** The central square within figure ii represents the policy agora; a space that encapsulates both research providers and research knowledge. For research providers (or their work) to gain admission into the policy agora, the compatibility of their knowledge for or with the ideological and epistemological philosophies of the government of the day must be demonstrable. The agora, as its name suggests, is also seen to operate as a market place for research providers and their ideas, who will invariably compete within it to have their knowledge adopted by policy

### 2.7.1 – What leads to shifts in the parameters of the policy agora?

It has already been argued that discursive dominance can result in the normalization of a given ideological or epistemological position. How, then, does the nature of the policy agora shift or how can it be changed? One way may be through the political process; the election of a new party (or coalition of parties) to government is almost certainly likely to lead to shifts or changes in the ideological or political paradigm as new policy commitments are introduced, based on new ideologies, knowledge or ideas which had,

hitherto, existed outside of the agora. One example of a shift in the agora caused as a result of political change is the proposed introduction of 'restorative justice' disposals into the criminal justice system in England and Wales. This is described in detail, below<sup>21</sup>.

Broadly, the term 'restorative justice' is used to describe a range of 'interventions', both formal and informal, and that can either be run by communities or administered centrally (for example, in 2005, Chard and Ilminster in Somerset created a restorative Community Justice Panel to improve confidence in criminal justice in the area). Research into the efficacy of certain forms of restorative approaches indicate that their results seem promising: for example, findings from randomised control trials run by Shapland *et al.* (2007; 2008) suggest that use of pre and post sentence restorative justice interventions can reduce the frequency of offenders re-offending by 27 per cent and offer savings of £9 for every £1 spent on delivery.

Before the 2010 election, the political leanings of the Conservative Party were strongly in favour of a 'Big Society' approach to government, defined as "a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control"<sup>22</sup>. Big Society aims to "[break] state monopolies, [allow] charities, social enterprises and companies to provide public services, [devolve] power down to neighbourhoods, [make] government more accountable". In addition, the Conservatives felt ideologically driven to quickly reduce the level of government spending and the size of the UK's overall budget deficit<sup>23</sup>.

Restorative justice was therefore regarded by Conservative MPs as something which research demonstrated had 'worked' in terms of reducing re-offending. In addition it was also seen to fit perfectly into the 'Big Society', small government political philosophy that the conservatives were developing: that is, restorative justice was regarded as an approach which saved money and that could be run by communities for the benefit of those communities. In a speech made by Alan Duncan the (then) Conservative Shadow Minister for Prisons, he states that restorative justice: "fits well

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<sup>21</sup> The policy agora is regarded as a concept which has application beyond that of educational policy making. As such it is felt that it is appropriate to use restorative justice as an exemplar of how the agora can shift, despite its origins within the justice sector.

<sup>22</sup> See:

[http://www.conservatives.com/news/news\\_stories/2010/03/plans\\_announced\\_to\\_help\\_build\\_a\\_big\\_society.aspx](http://www.conservatives.com/news/news_stories/2010/03/plans_announced_to_help_build_a_big_society.aspx)

<sup>23</sup> For example, see: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/jun/20/emergency-budget-bear-cuts-warns-osborne>

into the broad philosophy of Conservatism because it devolves power down to local communities and local people. Conferences are likely to take place in or near the community where the offence was committed” (2010: 6). Duncan also quotes the 2008 research undertaken by Shapland *et al.* and notes that “at a time when Government money is non-existent, [restorative justice] is incredibly cheap – incredibly cheap, incredibly effective and incredibly simple. Quite simply, what more could one ask for?” (2010: 7). As a result, the justice policy agora of the new government was shaped by a commitment to adopt restorative justice within the Criminal Justice System.<sup>24</sup> The detailed implementation of restorative justice has subsequently been left to civil service officials to progress; in doing so they are considering not only Shapland *et al.*’s research but other studies that now reside within the agora.

Another way a policy agora might be shifted is via a growing weight of evidence for alternative viewpoints (Kirst, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003a; Cohn, 2006; Levin, 2008; Ouimet *et al.*, 2009). As a result, the nature of the ideological/political and epistemological paradigms that form the agora will also be a function of the existence of a wider corpus of knowledge and/or points of view. To facilitate change, any alternative/replacement corpus must be close to reaching what Gladwell (2000) describes as its ‘tipping point’ in terms of general ‘acceptability’ to, or adoption by, both policy-makers and the general public. Thus policy agoras will be broadly centred around dominant points of view until these are shifted by the force of any consensus. In turn, this impacts on the nature of subsequent knowledge or evidence produced and traded within any future policy agora and which is ultimately considered and/or processed by policy-makers through the policy-making framework.

## **2.8 – The situation of this thesis within the wider context of evidence-informed policy making**

As can be seen from this initial review of literature, the concept of evidence-informed policy making is contextualised by a highly documented discourse. Aspects of this discourse include suggestions for why the concept of evidence-informed policy can, in reality, fall short of expectations as well as fundamental questions over the credibility or desirability of adopting an evidence-informed approach. I also argue that the actualisation of evidence-informed policy requires, as a precursor, a conjoining of the

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<sup>24</sup> This is outlined in the manifesto of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government: *The Coalition: our programme for government*<sup>24</sup>, published on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2010. Here it is stated that: “We will introduce effective measures to tackle anti-social behaviour and low-level crime, including forms of restorative justice...”.

epistemological with the political or ideological. The consequence of such a conjoin is that the policy agoras which emerge and the knowledge providers that operate within them, can be seen to affect the scope of the evidence that may be adopted by policy-makers as part of the overall process of developing policy. The agora may also be viewed from Foucaultian perspective: they are shaped by the dominant 'regime of truth' whilst also acting as conduits through which the 'will to knowledge' operates, since it is within the agora that knowledge is appropriated and disseminated.

Despite these issues this study has, at its core, the assumption that evidence-informed policy making should lead to better developed policy. This assumption is grounded in the work of Campbell *et al.* (2007) who demonstrate that there have been a number of recent initiatives designed to enhance policy-makers' understanding of the importance of evidence and to encourage its use and guided by Banks (2009) who argues that, without evidence, policy will merely be based on intuition, dogma and conventional wisdom. I thus begin with the contention that it is inherently more sensible for policy-makers to consider evidence when developing policy - even if, in the short term, that knowledge only relates to what is politically and epistemologically favoured at any given point in time; that is, even if it is only the knowledge that is being traded in the current policy agora. This is because, in the long term, the policy agora can be shifted if a weight of evidence pushes it to move in a particular direction. Thus, if the social robustness of evidence is seen to increase over a period of time, it will become further demanded by society and the nature of the policy agora will shift accordingly.

Turning now to the specific focus of my study or in establishing the nature of its problematic (Brown and Dowling, 1998), it is not my aim to provide further value judgement on the concept of evidence-informed policy, or to add to existing arguments in this area. Likewise, I am unconcerned with developing a detailed understanding of how policy is actually developed. Instead I concentrate on the factors that influence how and why research adoption occurs. This shift in focus is required for two reasons. First, following the emergence of a policy agora, I contend that the subsequent stage in the development of evidence-informed policy will be the successful adoption of knowledge by policy-makers. In other words policy will only be informed by evidence if, as prerequisites, that evidence both sits within the policy agora and is then adopted by policy-makers. It then, of course, must actually be used by policy-makers.

Secondly, and importantly, knowledge adoption can also take place outside of the agora. In this case, rather than evidence being adopted with regards to the

development of policy, adoption (most likely in the medium to long term) leads potentially to changes in the nature of the policy agora itself. This is achieved via shifts in the ideological and epistemological paradigms that determine the nature of policy agoras in the first place. In other words, adoption outside of the agora works to change opinion/perception or policy perspectives. Thus knowledge adoption has importance, not only in assisting in the policy making process now, but also in the future, via shifts in the parameters which outline the nature of evidence policy-makers are likely to consider.

In addition, as has been illustrated above, I regard current models conceptualizing the process of knowledge adoption as conceptually inadequate. I argue, therefore, that a new model of knowledge adoption is required and should be based upon a number of key assumptions: that successful adoption is dependent on appropriate actions being undertaken by both the audiences for evidence and the communicators of evidence; that to account for the occurrence of these actions there is a need to utilize existing sociological theory to understand the 'why' (i.e. what drives social actors to behave as they do, and; that the process of knowledge adoption operates at the level of the individual policy-maker or researcher, but that this process is also shaped by factors operating at a higher level of analysis (for example the dominant epistemological and ideological paradigms that make-up the policy agora). These arguments are developed in sections 3.1 to 3.3 (pp. 44-73) of the literature review. A theory to account for the formation of social relationships is then also introduced in section 3.5 (p. 75) and, as a result, a new model of knowledge adoption developed in section 3.6 (p. 80).

### **3 – The conceptualisation of a new model to explain the process of knowledge adoption**

I use this section to present a new model of knowledge adoption which I then assess empirically via the approach and research methods set out in chapter 4 (p. 90). The model is explained incrementally: I begin by splitting the process of knowledge adoption into its constituent parts; the consideration and use of evidence by policy-makers, and; the effective communication of evidence by researchers. I then introduce the model's 'contextualising' factors; those which influence the extent or nature of any effort required in order that knowledge adoption can occur. After reviewing and critically engaging with the literature relating to each of these, I set out the theoretical framework through which I view and conceptualise both social action and my engagement with the empirical; Social Activity Method (Dowling, 2005; 2007; 2008; 2008a). Finally, the models' constituent parts, its contextualising factors and Social Activity Method are conjoined to provide a more nuanced and sophisticated account of the process of knowledge adoption than existing work in this area.

#### **3.1 – The factors that influence the adoption of evidence by policy-makers**

My conceptualization of knowledge adoption is based, in part, upon the argument that successful adoption is dependent on appropriate actions being undertaken by both the audience for the evidence and the communicators of that evidence. This viewpoint stems from a number of authors; for example, Davenport and Prusak (1998: 88) who note: "while we will consider various knowledge exchange issues and strategies... many of them come down to finding effective ways to let people talk and listen to one another". I begin, therefore, by examining what affects whether and how policy-makers, viewed for this thesis as an audience for evidence, choose to adopt knowledge.

##### **3.1.1 – The capacity for policy-makers to engage with evidence**

The ability for policy audiences to adopt knowledge will depend, firstly, on the existence of any capacity or capability to enable and encourage policy-makers to make use of evidence. The degree to which this capacity exists will affect the success of the knowledge adoption effort. At an individual level, capacity/capability relates to the skills required to interpret and understand evidence. This may be illustrated by findings from a systematic review undertaken by Lavis (2006) which suggests that policy-makers'

lack of skills or expertise in relation to research literacy is likely to affect the prospects of evidence being used by them. Consequently an individual's capacity can be improved both through professional experience and appropriate training. Capacity at an organizational level must also exist, however, in order to ensure that appropriate incentives and/or the dominant culture encourage evidence to be actively considered throughout the policy making process (Ouimet *et al.*, 2009). Nutley *et al.* (2007) suggest that an appropriate infrastructure is also required if policy-makers, or the researchers working alongside them, are physically to access content. As Ouimet *et al.* (2009) note, however, such access can be expensive for government departments and agencies. It has also been suggested that organizational capacity involves the development of processes to harness the tacit knowledge that is held by individuals within an organisation and to transform this into explicit knowledge that can be utilised by the organisation as a whole (Sin, 2008a). Oxman *et al.* (2009a) describe these organisational factors as the existence of an institution's capacity to recognise and act on the need for evidence.

In addition to the initiatives described by Campbell *et al.* (2007) in the introduction to this thesis, both the Cabinet Office (1999, 2000) and Bullock *et al.* (2001) have outlined a number of programmes which have been instigated in order to increase the demand and use of evidence by policy-makers. These include requirements that departmental spending bids provide a supporting evidence base, the expectation that evidence used in all major policy decisions is made explicit and that more use is made of evaluated pilots as a pre-cursor to full policy implementation. In addition are initiatives relating to the training of policy staff in order to enhance their overall ability to effectively utilise evidence. In terms of DfE specific initiatives, the Government Office for Science (2010) report also details a number of schemes run by the Department in relation to improving the use of evidence. For example the 'Making Policy Happen Programme'; designed to shift policy-maker behaviours towards a better consideration and use of evidence in policy making.

While a number of studies suggest that capacity to understand and consider evidence does exist to some extent at the individual policy-maker level (Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Brown, 2009), Nutley *et al.* (2007) argue that the effects of organisational initiatives have not been fully evaluated and are restricted to case studies and anecdotes of success. At the same time, it should be noted that the DCSF's *Analysis and Evidence Strategies* (2008, 2009) fail to make mention of attempts to implement infrastructures or of efforts to coherently influence the demand for evidence within the Department. In



addition, the Cabinet Office's (2003) *Trying It Out* review of policy pilots across government found that, all too often, such pilots were quickly superseded by full policy roll-outs. I conclude, therefore, that, within the education sector in England, attempts at any systematic use of incentives or attempts to embed a culture that directs policy-makers to consider research use have, to date, been limited.

### **3.1.2 – How knowledge adoption is dependent upon factors that are inherent to the individual policy-maker**

The existence of capacity at the level of the individual policy-maker does not necessarily mean that policy-makers will act as sponges and soak up every piece of knowledge they come across. Instead, it is suggested that factors such as: existing knowledge and beliefs (Weiss, 1982; Landry *et al.*, 2001; Bowen and Zwi, 2005); the perceived credibility of knowledge suppliers (Davies, 2006; 2007; Council for Science and Technology, 2008); access to policy-makers (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Levin, 2004); perceptions regarding the quality of the research process (Campbell, 2007; Nutley *et al.*, 2007), and; the social robustness of any knowledge (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994; Gibbons, 1999; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003) will combine with individual capacities and so shape or determine what evidence is likely to be considered (Huberman, 1990).

The remainder of this section expands upon these factors that researchers may find themselves faced with when looking to influence policy-makers. It should be noted that these factors are seen to be inherent to the individual policy-maker. As such, they differ from those outlined by both Davies (2004) and Lavis (2006) when considering the actual development of policy (section 2.1; p. 13). In other words, they differ from any exogenous elements which also feed into the policy making process (Trowler, 2003). These are likely to include economic events such as recession, wars or civil strife, natural disasters or other social crises. This differentiation only works, however, because this thesis is concerned with the adoption of research. The end result of knowledge adoption is simply seen to be a change in an individual policy-maker's overall corpus of knowledge or level of understanding, rather than any act taken as a result of having acquired this knowledge (Weiss, 1979, 1982). Consequently, it is the factors inherent to an individual policy-maker that will impact on this process. Conversely, it is argued that it is Davies' (2004) and Lavis' (2006) exogenous elements that are likely to affect both the realisation of any actual use of knowledge and the creation of new policy.

### **3.1.3 – Policy-makers’ demand for new information**

The success of any adoption of knowledge will depend upon the demand for that information by the audience in question. As such, it is ultimately in the gift of policy-makers which information they digest, or whether they choose to re-examine long-standing viewpoints (Levin, 2004). Policy-makers do not accept without question every conclusion presented to them (Weiss, 1982) and given the privileging power afforded to policy-makers, Sechrest *et al.* (1994), Shapiro (1994) and Lavis *et al.* (2002) have all suggested that the adoption of evidence will necessarily depend upon whether those potentially acquiring new knowledge have pre-existing, or researcher generated, reasons to take on board more information. For example, uncertainty amongst policy-makers about an issue, feeling challenged about certain aspects of a particular problem, or having insufficient existing information in a given subject area are all factors increasing the likelihood of knowledge adoption. Consequently, Nutley *et al.* (2007: 72) note that “for policy-makers to feel swayed by research, it [needs] to provide new narratives that are powerful enough to destabilise the existing discourses through which policy is enacted”.

### **3.1.4 – The importance of the credibility of the knowledge source**

Policy-makers’ receptiveness to sources of evidence will also be a function of the reputations of those providing the research (Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Court and Young, 2003; Kirst, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Nutley *et al.*, 2007). The credibility or trustworthiness of the source of any evidence is therefore paramount, with Campbell *et al.* (2007) contending that credibility is a function of a number of factors, including the perceived bias of the researchers. Kirst (2000) also suggests that credibility is a direct result of whether knowledge transmitters are seen to have acknowledged expertise, which might include any previous experience they may have had in working within, or for, government. Credibility can thus be seen to be an attribute afforded by policy-makers to the knowledge provider in question.

### **3.1.5 – Policy-makers’ involvement in research studies**

Rickinson *et al.*, (2011) observe that the practices of research and policy have the potential to positively impact upon each other: evidence can be used to challenge assumptions, provide alternative options or interpretations and provide summative

confirmations of existing policy decisions; the practice of policy making may involve a questioning of research priorities, the focus of research questions or the timeliness of research outputs. There have been a number of recent initiatives to develop closer links between researchers and policy-makers in order to capitalise on this potential for positive impact: Sebba (2007) notes, for instance, that the concept of ‘user engagement’ was incorporated as an underlying principle of one specific research programme; the UK’s *Teaching and Learning Research Programme* (TLRP), from the outset. Furthermore, a specific TLRP seminar series was designed to improve overall capacity in this area (Pollard, 2004).<sup>25</sup>

Weiss (1998) argues that interactive processes such as user engagement are effective because they transform reporting into learning. Keown *et al.* (2008) augments this argument, noting that policy-makers involved in the research process are also likely to informally communicate the findings of research to their colleagues and, in addition, that user engagement tends to result in the ‘capacity building’ of policy-makers. Council for Science and Technology (2008) also suggest that user engagement is crucial to maintaining dialogue and the continuous flow of ideas, ensuring that projects remain relevant and at the forefront of policy-makers’ thinking. Despite the benefits of engaging users, it was noted by Edwards *et al.* (2007) that within TLRP, as with user engagement more generally, the chief concern for researchers appeared to be how policy might be influenced after a project has arrived at its conclusion rather than how to involve policy-makers or practitioners throughout the research process. Rickinson *et al.* (2011) too suggest that user engagement is frequently limited to discussions of the findings rather than full involvement throughout the research process.

Networks of policy-makers, practitioners and researchers are also regarded as an effective way of increasing the demand for research (Gilchrist, 2000; Kirst, 2000; Watson *et al.*, 2002; Cooper and Levin, 2010). This is because networks create ongoing social contact and dialogue, which help persuade policy-makers of the relevance of the evidence or issues and so increase the chances that research might be used (Nutley *et al.*, 2007). An example of the use of networks may be taken from the knowledge management programme at the University of Toronto. Here Cooper and Levin (2010) note that active efforts to facilitate learning about knowledge management include the building of collaborative interactions between researchers and practitioners

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<sup>25</sup> See: <http://www.tlrp.org/themes/seminar/edwards/current.html>

in different disciplines and countries and the maintenance of a listserv for sharing ideas and resources (involving some 100 people in 10 countries).

Cooper and Levin (2010) suggest, however, that whilst networks are recognized as an effective medium through which to share knowledge and effect change, they are difficult to build and maintain. For instance, they note that participation and interaction in and on the University of Toronto's knowledge management listserv remains low. They also contend that while network participants or potential participants may express an interest in activities, they may find that they simply do not have or cannot find the time to participate to any significant degree. Cooper and Levin conclude that networks take resource and effort to nurture and maintain and that those interested in creating networks must take active steps to foster and facilitate involvement. Low take up or participation may also be a factor of the 'artificiality' of any such network. As a result, Kirst (2000) argues that, where possible, the utilisation of existing, successful, networks should be prioritised over the formation of new ones.

### **3.1.6 – Policy-makers' perceptions of the quality of evidence**

Both Campbell *et al.* (2007) and Nutley *et al.* (2007) suggest that perceptions of quality will also affect any demand for evidence. There has been much criticism of the quality of educational research in recent years. (e.g. see Tooley and Darby, 1998; Levin, 2003; Oancea, 2005). However, such criticism does not seem to sit well with available assessments. Taking the last two sets of RAE results, for example, it can be seen that the quality of educational research across the UK higher education sector has risen significantly from just 13 universities having elements of their research awarded any grade of 'international excellence' in 2001, to 58 institutions having elements of their research being judged as 'world-leading' in 2008 (while 82 were judged to have produced elements of research of at least 'internationally recognised' quality).<sup>26</sup>

In addition, definitions of quality and what quality might mean with regards to educational (or indeed social) research have only recently been developed. The 1998 review of educational research by Hillage *et al.* could not find or provide a single objective definition of the term 'quality of research'. By 2008 a definition of quality had been developed for the Research Assessment Exercise of that year and was expressed as relating to the concepts of 'originality' (i.e. research that investigates

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<sup>26</sup> See: <http://www.rae.ac.uk/2001/results/> and <http://www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2008/01/>

existing issues in new ways, or that engages with new issues or debates), ‘significance’ (in terms of providing new thought or knowledge, or in utilising ground-breaking approaches) and ‘rigour’ (a systematic approach combined with methodological and theoretical robustness)<sup>27</sup>.

In terms of this thesis, since evidence is conceptualised as a product of the research process, salient notions of quality include those which concern methodological approach. For example, those favouring quantitative methods, traditionally rooted in the positivistic paradigm, typically judge methodological quality by notions of validity or reliability, since such concepts support aims such as generalization, replicability and the manipulation of data in order to test hypotheses (Brown and Dowling, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; also detailed in Appendix A; p. 223). Researchers employing or interpreting data from qualitative approaches, meanwhile, typically utilise the idea of researcher reflexivity in order to attempt to identify bias, to establish the wider credibility of their findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Charmaz, 2006 also detailed in Appendix A). But evidence is also regarded within this thesis as data that has been interpreted. As such, the notion of theoretical robustness encapsulated by the RAE’s definition of ‘rigour’ also has relevance. As do the proposals to assess the impact of high quality research that are currently being developed by HEFCE as part of the Research Excellence Framework. This is because HEFCE’s approach will examine examples of conceptual or instrumental impact (which HEFCE, 2010, suggest might range from providing compelling evidence to government to successfully influencing policy). As such the REF will measure whether any interpretation of data has successfully addressed a particular policy issue.

The notion that ‘quality’ can exist as a tightly defined concept that might be easily applied to research has been critiqued, however. Nutley *et al.* (2007) suggest that criteria are likely to vary significantly according to whether they have been defined by policy-makers or researchers. Likewise Ball (1995) contends that, in education, both the notions of quality and the applicability of research are prescribed and delineated by dominant government discourses and technologies (such as the Research Assessment Exercise) which have helped form a culture of managerialism, accountability and audit,

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<sup>27</sup> Quality was not explicitly defined for RAE 2001; panel members were instead required to use their judgement, knowledge and expertise to come to a view. It was suggested, however, that “the characteristics of quality that the Panel will use in making its judgements about research will include such features as originality, the contribution to the advancement of knowledge, methodological strength, scholarly rigour and relevance for other researchers, policy-makers or practitioners”. See: [http://www.rae.ac.uk/2001/pubs/5\\_99/byuoa/crit68.htm](http://www.rae.ac.uk/2001/pubs/5_99/byuoa/crit68.htm)

pre-occupied with the idea of being able to determine 'what works'. In turn, this is seen as narrowing the 'epistemological infrastructure' (Atkinson, 2000) upon which policy might be based.

Thus the link created by government discourse between 'what works' and quality, in particular via those reports undertaken by Hillage *et al.* (1998) and Tooley and Darby/Ofsted (1998), has led to a drive towards 'instrumentalism', a preference for quantitative research and, as a consequence, a dearth in terms of the development of new theory (Atkinson, 2000): new theory, Atkinson contends, being the 'essential infrastructure' for the quality of research in any discipline. Similarly MacLure (2005) notes that EPPI<sup>28</sup> guidance on conducting systematic reviews provides clear criteria for assessing the quality of studies. MacLure contends, however, that by prescribing one defined way of assessing quality, EPPI (and indeed other, standard) definitions fail to take into account certain, non quantifiable, facets of quality, such as the tacit knowledge or theoretical notions employed by the researcher.

Pawson (2001), however, offers a counter, realist, perspective; suggesting that it can only be the theoretical mechanisms underlying programmes or initiatives that trigger change, not the programmes themselves. From this perspective, Pawson observes that systematic reviews and other efforts to determine 'what works', only fail to encourage the development of theory because they seek to bring together evaluations from 'families' of interventions rather than 'families' of mechanisms. For example, when looking at ways of tackling offender rehabilitation, reviews might consider programmes (such as 'anger management', 'cognitive skills training', 'use of probation' etc) rather than viewing the situation as one of 'incentivisation' across domains that affect offenders (justice, education, health, employment etc.). Moving from assessing programme interventions to theoretical mechanisms, Pawson maintains, would enable such reviews to provide more meaningful comparison of 'like with like' and an end result comprising a more contingent "this programme theory works in these respects, for these subjects, in these kind of situations" (2001: 5). Pawson thus regards the development of theory based on the outputs of strategic reviews as both feasible and as the primary mechanism to aid policy development.

In terms of the use of qualitative research within systematic reviews, Pawson (2006) again employs an alternative perspective; here he contends that whilst qualitative

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<sup>28</sup> The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre). See: <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/>

research has and can be considered, that measures of assessment developed to judge whether it is of a sufficient quality for inclusion have, ultimately, resulted in a self-defeating, unwieldy set of appraisal apparatus (citing Spencer *et al.*, 2003). This is because such standards “echo the very nature of qualitative explanation” (2006: 133). In other words, attempts to capture the multifaceted nature of qualitative research have necessarily resorted to measurements of attributes such as ‘coherence’ or ‘clarity’. As such, they represent what Pawson describes as a “methodological charter rather than a quality index” (*ibid*). Because of this fastidiousness, qualitative ‘methodological charters’ can often describe a vast number of attributes; Pawson observes that in Spencer *et al.*, for example, 75 indicators of the quality of qualitative research are provided. This, however, significantly reduces the utility of these charters since they become unmanageable in their application and their use as inclusion criteria becomes difficult to justify. Judging against 75 separate standards is also likely to significantly lengthen the overall outputs of the systematic review and runs counter to the purposes of such reviews; namely to provide concise research summaries. Pawson (2006: 133) concludes that there exists a paradox: “the yardsticks of good qualitative research do not correspond to the hallmarks of good synthesis”.

The critiques postulated by Ball (1995), Atkinson (2000), MacLure (2005) and Pawson (2006) appear to comprise two fundamental, albeit related, arguments. One questions how can we effectively judge whether studies are of a high quality in terms of both the methodology employed and how the data have been interpreted: in other words, this argument relates to the notions of quality, usability and the relevance of evidence. The other may be seen as a critique of the epistemological and political drivers of ‘quality’ put in place by policy-makers: viewed by critics as serving to reduce the nature of evidence to that of a raw, context free, resource and to promote a specific hierarchy of knowledge which privileges those evidence types and research methods that are perceived to provide an understanding of ‘what works’<sup>29</sup>. The link between these two arguments is related to power inequalities between policy-makers and academics; in particular the argument that not only do policy-makers have discursive dominance in defining the nature of quality, but through control of the funding of research policy-

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<sup>29</sup> Pawson (2006) suggests that a typical hierarchy comprises (in order): randomised controlled trials; quasi experimental studies; before-and-after comparisons; cross-sectional, random sample studies; process evaluation; qualitative case studies and ethnographic research; descriptive guides and examples of good practice; professional and expert opinion, and; user opinion.

makers are also able to enforce this definition, for example, via the sponsoring of organisations such as the EPPI-centre.

In attempting to resolve these arguments it is my contention that, firstly, it is reasonable for the funders of research to attempt to judge the relative quality of the outputs they are supporting and that doing so requires some form of measurement which can be applied across a range of research projects. Hargreaves (1997), for example, notes that if policy-makers feel that they are unable to ascertain the quality of educational research then, ultimately, they may question their investment in it. I also suggest that such a measurement has to be broad in approach in order to capture the multitude of diverse and varied methods in play, whilst also reflecting the importance of contextual nuances when designing approaches to fieldwork: I note, for example that those critiquing existing 'strict' definitions of quality still believe that it is possible to dissect and critique the methodological assumptions made within individual studies (for example, Foster *et al.*, 1996; Hammersley, 1992). As a result, my conclusion is that more use should be made of Oancea and Furlong's (2007) model of quality. This considers a number of assessment criteria, all of which relate to the definition of evidence employed by this study, including: methodological and theoretical robustness, use value and timeliness, the reaction to the research by policy-makers and practitioners, and the cost effectiveness of the study.

The second argument; the postmodern critique of quality, which assumes that a 'what works' approach necessarily relies on a positivist cause and effect model of working, has been rejected by Hargreaves (1997) who describes it as an 'oversimplification' of how research is used. For example, Hargreaves draws on Berlin's (1996: 46-47) concept of practical wisdom as:

a sense of what will 'work' and what will not. It is a capacity, in the first place, for synthesis rather than analysis, for the knowledge in the sense in which trainers know their animals, or parents their children... an acute sense of what fits with what, what springs from what, what leads to what...

I thus contend that 'what works' evidence constitutes an extra factor to augment and complement, rather than replace, judgement.

Finally, I claim that an political and epistemological commitment to a 'what works' approach to education does not necessarily have to exclusively rely on quantitative



evidence, downgrade the role of qualitative research, nor exclude the development of theory. This works both theoretically and in practice. Taking a practical case; whilst MacLure (2005: 400) argues that EPPI quality weightings “strongly favour quantitative designs with large samples”, this statement is not reflected in the detail provided on the EPPI-Centre’s website,<sup>30</sup> which simply refers to the appropriateness of individual methodologies and the relevance of the focus of individual studies in relation to the review question. It is also denied by Gough (2004) and Oakley (2006) who have been heavily involved in EPPI’s work. Nutley *et al.* (2007) too suggest that the overall conclusion that can be made from analysing studies which aim to investigate whether policy-makers’ prefer quantitative data over qualitative are inconclusive. Some, they suggest, support the view that policy-makers prefer quantitative evidence (citing Barker, 1994 and Landry *et al.*, 2001), whilst others suggest that the reverse is true (citing Oh, 1997).

Moving to the theoretical, it is argued in Appendix A (p. 223) that mixed (i.e. qualitative and quantitative) methodological approaches should be embraced in order to illuminate the ‘why’ as well as the ‘what’. In addition I suggest there exists the potential for systematic reviews of ‘what works’ to form the first stage of a bottom up approach to theory building, akin to the development of constructive grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006)<sup>31</sup>. That is, by systematically discovering what works, the next logical step may be to discover why something works and from this to build a theory that accounts for contextual nuances and generalization (Pawson, 2001). Hargreaves (1997: 410) suggests, for instance, that “one can also start with evidence on which teacher practices are most effective in the teaching of literacy and work backwards, so to speak, to implications for how basic studies on pupil learning might proceed”.

Given the arguments outlined above, it might be assumed that ensuring a research study exhibits a high level of quality should be seen as a prerequisite if it is to be adopted by policy-makers. This assumption has been heavily questioned (Weiss, 1982; Huberman, 1987; Edwards, 1991). One example of how poor quality research can

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<sup>30</sup> <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=177>

<sup>31</sup> Glaser and Strauss (1967) posit that theory should be developed in full relationship to a given context (and ‘grounded’ in the data derived from that context) rather than developed in advance of any engagement with the empirical. Charmaz (2006) suggests that grounded theory is now commonly critiqued for displaying the same positivistic tendencies that led to its initial acceptance. As a result, Charmaz (2006) puts forward the notion of ‘constructivist’ grounded theory. Here, unlike ‘traditional’ grounded theory, where theories are discovered and emerge as separate from the researcher, the researcher is considered part of the world they study and the data they collect. Thus grounded theories are constructed through interactions and involvements with people and research processes.

have a short term impact but has failed to stand up to full scrutiny (and the consequences of acting on such research) can be seen in what has come to be known as the ‘MMR scare’. The ‘scare’ originated from a research paper published by Wakefield *et al.* (1998) in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, which suggested a tentative link between immunisation at the age of 18 months, a bowel disorder called Crohn’s disease, and autism. As a result, and fuelled by media coverage of the research, many parents became anxious over the safety of the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine. Consequently, uptake of the MMR vaccine fell (only 81% of children in the UK were given the vaccine in 2004-05) and in 2006 a 13-year-old boy became the first person in the UK to die from measles in 14 years.

Wakefield *et al.*’s research was, however, fundamentally flawed and an investigation in 2004 by journalist Brian Deer for *The Sunday Times*<sup>32</sup> also discovered conflicts of interest suggesting that Dr Wakefield could have profited financially by the scare. In January 2010, nearly 12 years later, the General Medical Council ruled that Wakefield had “failed in his duties as a responsible consultant and showed a callous disregard” for the suffering of the subjects involved in his research. In May 2010, Dr Wakefield was struck off the medical register after having been found guilty of serious professional misconduct. It can be argued, therefore, that whilst quality may not necessarily impact on whether the findings of a study are considered in the short term, over time such studies are less likely to provide findings that stand up to scrutiny. This means that, in the long term, the authors of such studies or the institutions in which they are employed are less likely to be trusted (Lavis, 2006).

### **3.1.7 – Researchers’ access to policy-makers**

One example of researchers successfully accessing policy-makers is provided by the *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE)* project undertaken by Sylva *et al.* (2007). Here researchers involved with the study report that supportive organisational structures were established within the DCSF (the study’s commissioners) and that these structures not only provided access to policy-makers, but also enabled effective two-way exchange to take place, facilitating joint decision making. More detail on the study and its subsequent impact on policy can be found in Appendix E (p. 240).

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<sup>32</sup> see: <http://briandeer.com/mmr/lancet-summary.htm>

Davies *et al.* (2000) note that gaining access to policy-makers may be problematic if relative differences in status, such as those highlighted by Davies' (2006) policy 'food chain' (sub-section 3.3.2, p. 69), exist between such researchers and those they wish to influence. The process of gaining access often involves researchers approaching policy-makers directly, or by building relationships with those 'privileged' by policy-makers, so that they may act as knowledge brokers for the evidence in hand. Levin (2004) contends that in such cases access may be driven by chance and one commonly experienced problem is that researchers are often frustrated in their efforts by not knowing who to attempt to influence (Edwards *et al.*, 2007). In part, this may be a consequence of what Weiss describes as the diffuse nature of policy making. Here "ideas from research are picked up in different ways and percolate through office holders in many offices who deal with the issues" (1982: 622).

One part of the policy 'food chain' that may be within reach to academic researchers, however, is that of the media. Commission of the European Communities (2007), for example, suggest that contact between researchers and policy-makers is often filtered through mediators such as print or broadcast media. This appears to be less common in the UK: it was noted by the Commission on the Social Sciences, for instance, that "we know that social scientists do not figure much in the media" (2003: 86). The authors of the report draw their conclusion from a survey conducted by Bryman and Deacon (1996): here only 21% of social scientists involved had actively sought to promote their work to journalists and, in addition, only half of those surveyed had been contacted by journalists of any kind during the previous three years (no data are supplied on the volume of material actually used). Thus, in many ways, the low level of media exposure to social research has been viewed as much a result of a lack of media awareness on the part of social researchers, as it is a result of journalists privileging studies that allow concrete inferences to be made.

Campbell *et al.* (2007) claim that the media, as a gauge of public opinion, will influence the thinking of both Ministers and of Senior Civil Servants. Ball (2007) concurs, citing the example of the underachievement of boys in the late 1990s. This, he suggests, led to the media spurring a 'moral panic' which resulted in 1998 with the (as was) New Labour government developing policies to tackle the issue. Nonetheless researchers may find it hard to ensure that the findings of research studies are reported upon without spin or prejudice. Commission on the Social Sciences (2003) note that social scientists often complain that journalists appear to want to use them as 'cheap' sources of information whilst riding roughshod over the fine, and often crucial, details of the

study. Mortimore (2000) too maintains that dealing with the media when the findings of a particular project are complex has always been problematic, even more so when the findings are contrary to a given and current policy. This, Mortimore suggests, is because the media are primarily interested in the potential for maximising conflict in order to sell papers and thus, as Levin (2004a) observes, covering research that can be used to 'blame' either government policy or teachers for some education crisis or other. These points lead the Commission on the Social Sciences to conclude, as Levin (2004) does, that, given their relative positions in Davies' (2006) policy 'food chain', not only is a more sophisticated understanding of media practice on the part of social researchers required, but that plans to communicate research findings via the media (and handling strategies for doing so) should be built into projects at the earliest possible opportunity.

### **3.2 – Factors affecting whether evidence is communicated effectively by researchers**

A second instrumental factor in ensuring that knowledge is adopted concerns the effective communication of evidence. Referring back to the definition of evidence employed by this thesis, communication thus refers to how interpreted research outputs are disseminated to potential audiences. Existing literature suggests that the actualisation of evidence-informed policy may be hindered because research outputs are seen by policy-makers as being inaccessible. In an early analysis of evidence-informed policy in the US, for instance, Lindblom and Cohen contend that:

In public policy making, many suppliers and users of social science research are dissatisfied, the former because they are not listened to, the latter because they do not hear much they want to listen to (1979: 1).

Others (Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Mortimore, 2000; Levin, 2003; Gough, 2004; Lagemann, 2008; Slavin, 2008) build on Lindblom and Cohen's analysis by arguing that, despite any desire on the part of policy-makers to take on board evidence, the majority of academic research cannot help government find solutions to current and immediate issues and challenges because findings are communicated through channels that policy-makers find esoteric and presented in a language that they cannot quickly digest. Levin (2008) also notes that there is little evidence on the websites of most universities to indicate that researchers are actively attempting to improve upon this

situation through, for example, the forging of knowledge mobilization or dissemination relationships with policy-makers or knowledge brokers.

Both Wolter *et al.* (2002) and a 2008 paper by the Commission of the European Communities suggest that perceived issues surrounding the ineffectual communication of research should be regarded as structural in nature. Wolter *et al.* (2002) note, for example, that educational research tends to be fragmented by its constituent disciplines (sociology, psychology, economics etc.) and that this fragmentation results in such research being based on a variety of methods and promulgated via a myriad of separate and disparate discourses. There is, as a result, an often-confusing lack of consistency in how educational research is communicated. The situation may also, in part, be exacerbated by a historic lack of funding for research dissemination or communication (Sebba, 2007). In addition, or as a consequence, Nutley *et al.* (2007) note that researchers report a lack of both the knowledge and the experience required for them to engage in research communication activity. Mortimore (2000) contends, however, that, in the past, academics have not always taken policy users of research seriously and it is recommended by Pollard and Oancea (2010) that universities and academics now make effective communication integral to their work. Lagemann summarises the issues raised above by suggesting that there is a need to investigate what constitutes “usable knowledge” (2008: 425) and that “it is enormously challenging to figure out how to translate the findings of research into tools for use” (2008: 426), with translation being seen as equating to effective communication.

As with all arguments surrounding the realization of evidenced-based policy, such debates should be viewed within their broader context and issues of power, ideology and discursive control fully considered. Mortimore, for example, notes that researchers’ current use and choice of communication media may be influenced by politicians and policy-makers, observing that: “we are driven by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) – introduced by politicians – but are then criticised for presenting our work in a form which is not user-friendly to those same politicians” (2000: 15). Hillage *et al.* (1998) too suggest that previous RAE processes and scoring did not incentivise academic researchers to engage with policy-makers in either the content of research or in its effective dissemination. This situation has now been broadly rectified, however, and in both the 2001 and 2008 RAE exercises there were ‘user’ members of the panel who participated in the assessment, while institutions were called upon to state how they engaged with policy-makers. The impact of research over time on potential users, including government, will also form part of the Research Excellence

Framework and scoring system proposed for 2014.

In addition, if policy-makers possess or exhibit varying propensities to take on board research or challenges to the status quo, then they are employing a particular type of knowledge adoption strategy. The employment of such a strategy will therefore impact upon the dialogic interaction between themselves and those responsible for research: Plewis and Goldstein (1998) argue, for example, that the UK's last Conservative government systematically ignored research that questioned the viability of its flagship policies on standards and targets, no matter how well communicated it was. Swift, meanwhile, suggests that policy-makers, rather than welcome original ideas are "there to cherry-pick whatever phrases suit their current purposes" and notes that: "you can see their [policy-makers'] eyes glazing over until someone says something that sounds like something they already believe" (2001: 40). Similarly, it is my contention that policy-makers promote a 'deficit' model of research; as a consequence, they are likely to give primacy to the argument that it is researchers who communicate evidence poorly rather than entertain other possibilities, such as the extent of their [policy-makers'] ability to work in partnership with researchers, or any lack of capacity on the part of policy-makers to take on board academic evidence (Levin, 2004; Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Brown, 2009). Oancea and Furlong's (2007: 4) observe that it is:

now almost a decade since David Hargreaves launched his critical commentary on the quality of educational research, criticisms that were later "made official" by the Hillage report... Seven or eight years on, a perception of poor quality remains prevalent in government circles.

Since both Hargreaves (1996) and Hillage *et al.* (1998) also criticise the accessibility of educational research and the dissemination efforts of researchers, I argue that policy-makers' perceptions of the communication efforts of researchers also likely to remain low. This notion of a deficit model of research is further explored in section 8.4 (p. 196).

Nonetheless, there are still compelling arguments (Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Sylva *et al.*, 2007; Brown, 2009) to suggest that the effective communication of evidence can have an impact on whether knowledge is successfully traded within the policy agora or aids shifts in the political and discursive paradigms that come together to form it (also see Appendix E (p. 240) which describes how the *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education* study successfully informed the development of DCSF policy and the

communication techniques employed by the *EPPE* team). This next section therefore considers four key communication factors in detail:

- i. The 'accessibility' of the message to policy-makers
- ii. Clarity of presentation
- iii. The efficacy of the communication type
- iv. The level of proactivity, contextualization and tailoring undertaken by researchers

### **3.2.1 – The 'accessibility' of the message to policy-makers**

It has been argued that academics' use of academic journals as their primary mode of dissemination can often lead policy-makers and practitioners to regard research outputs as inaccessible (Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Wolter *et al.*, 2002). I believe that it is useful, therefore, to begin by examining the notion of 'accessibility' in more detail and to explore how the accessibility of research findings may be improved.

In 2003, Lavis *et al.* produced a framework designed to describe the individual constituents of effective research communication, based on an assessment of both systematic reviews and other studies (using a range of methodological approaches) undertaken in the health sector in Canada. Lavis *et al.*'s meta-analysis suggests that, in terms of content, policy-makers prefer to be presented with 'ideas' rather than pure data since "decision makers rarely use a regression coefficient to help them solve a particular problem" (2003: 223). Likewise, it is argued (Lindblom and Cohen, 1979; Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Davies 2006) that policy-makers are keen to receive 'straightforward' narratives or stories coupled with advice they can understand, with Court and Young maintaining that policymakers can be convinced about a new approach if the story is simple and convincing enough.

Giroux (1992), counters Lavis *et al.*'s findings and Court and Young's claims by arguing that there exists a politics of simplicity which attempts to regulate communication so that it is always intelligible according to terms set by the status quo, with a constant danger, as Sharland and Taylor (2006) claim, of researchers compromising their message by trying to communicate the complexity of their work in too simplified a way. However, as, Majumder *et al.* (1994) note, any message will be worthless if potential users cannot interpret it; a point also reflected by Council for Science and Technology

(2008). Brown concurs, utilizing the term “accessibility” (2009: 35) to encompass key attributes such as clarity, the type of language used and the structure of reports. Backer (1991: 234), also maintains that whether research is designed for, or critical of, given government policy, it: “needs to be translated into language that potential users can understand readily [and] abbreviated so that attention spans are not exceeded”.

A requirement for actionable, accessible messages is also reflected in the 1:3:25 reporting format set out by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF)<sup>33</sup>. Here written reports for the Foundation are required to follow the same format: a page of key takeout messages derived from the report, a three page executive summary and a complete report of no more than 25 pages in length. This format is designed to ensure that any CHSRF output immediately sets out the implications of the report for its policy audience, whilst providing further detail if required. CHSRF also request that researchers adopt a writing style that is accessible to policy-makers.

It should be noted that only two of the studies listed above were based on empirical analysis.<sup>34</sup> The first, Lavis *et al.*, (2003) assessed the validity of the message framework by seeking the views of researchers rather than policy-makers; the second, undertaken by myself (Brown, 2009), comprises a case study of one government organisation. Thus the views of policy-makers with regards to the aspects identified in the studies detailed above, such as what constitutes ‘understandable’, ‘actionable’ and, so, ‘useful’ content for a message, or on issues such as what makes a study ‘digestible’ or ‘actionable’, are largely un-established.

### 3.2.2 – Clarity in presentation

Nutley *et al.* (2007: 71) argue that “presentation is key: research must be attractive... and visually appealing”. In my case study of the Training and Development Agency for Schools, a number of policy-makers interviewed highlighted a report produced by Barber and Mourshed (and published by McKinsey & Co.) in 2007<sup>35</sup> as an excellent example of effective presentation. One of the report’s authors, Michael Barber, is specifically highlighted by Ball and Exley (2010: 1) as a former policy advisor and

<sup>33</sup> See: [www.chsrf.ca/knowledge\\_transfer/pdf/cn-1325\\_e.pdf](http://www.chsrf.ca/knowledge_transfer/pdf/cn-1325_e.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Hillage *et al.* (1998) was empirically based but fails to detail what accessibility might mean in practice.

<sup>35</sup> *How the world’s best performing school systems come out on top*, available at: [http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds\\_School\\_systems\\_final.pdf](http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/socialsector/resources/pdf/Worlds_School_systems_final.pdf)



intellectual of the previous New Labour government and, as such, someone who is fully implicated in “the rise of policy networks”; Ball and Exley’s conceptualisation of those who now influence policy (see sub-section 3.3.2; p. 69). As a result, it might be concluded that policy-makers commenting in this way provide a concrete example of the discursive trends theorised within critical policy sociology (i.e. Ball and Exley propose shifts in the nature and type of policy actors who are able to influence policy and/or control policy discourse: further detail is provided in sub-sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2; pp. 67-72). Most policy-makers, however, saw through the content of what was being presented, readily acknowledging the report’s limitations in terms of lack of academic rigor and minimal use of evidence. Instead, respondents expressed the view that the physical presentation of the report enabled the quick and easy absorption of information. It is my contention therefore, that by utilising the format they did in publishing their work, Barber and Mourshed demonstrate a shrewd awareness of the importance of effective communication to the knowledge adoption process.

It is suggested, therefore, that the notion of ‘clarity of presentation’, that is, the look and feel of a piece of research, is key to the effective and efficient communication of findings. Reports do not necessarily have to take the ‘Barber’ approach, but there is a requirement for rigorous information that is also easy on the eye. In Brown (2009), I also suggest that future studies in the area of effective research communication might consider further analysis in this area. For example, a rhetorical study<sup>36</sup> of the Barber and Mourshed report to understand what makes it appealing as a document and what can be learnt from how it presents its arguments. I have taken this suggestion forward and the resultant analysis is presented in section 4.8 (p. 107) and Appendix M (p. 261).

### **3.2.3 – The efficacy of the method of communication employed**

The method used to disseminate research and evidence is vital if it is to grab the attention of potential users. Mortimore (2000: 19) notes for example that:

Having seen and heard a case study of a school presented using multimedia techniques in which the economic basis and geography of the catchment area were set alongside the attitudes of parents – expressed in recorded face-to-face interviews – and related to the actions of teachers and pupils in filmed

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<sup>36</sup> Rhetorical analysis is detailed in section 4.8, (p. 107).

classroom observations I now find many written accounts bland and pre-digested.

In terms of the efficacy of different types of communication media that may aid the research communication process, early studies such as that of Paisley (1993), suggest that new and emerging methods of communication will only be effective when used in conjunction with face-to-face interaction. This corresponds with the findings of a review by Lavis *et al.* (2003), the views of Levin (2008), Cohn (2006) and with the work of Davies (2006); all of which indicate that passive communication processes (for example, making research findings available via websites) are ineffective, while interactive engagement between policy-makers and researchers are more likely to lead to research findings being acted upon.

I have previously contended (Brown, 2009) that research seminars, where academics are invited to government departments to present on recent and relevant research, are considered by both researchers and policy-makers as a highly successful and an appropriate and efficient way of communicating information. In my 2009 study, policy-makers, for example, felt that of all the communication media available, face-to-face contact brought the research alive, allowed them to ask questions in real time, or to challenge or explore in more detail as appropriate. As a consequence, such seminars enhanced their receptivity towards a given piece of research. It can be argued from a critical perspective that only selected (favoured or privileged) academics will be given the opportunity to engage in face-to-face dialogue with policy-makers and only with regards to the findings of particular studies. Sebba suggests, however, that in her experience as a government advisor on research strategy for the then Department for Education and Employment, that this “wasn’t the case. We heard some quite difficult conversations where people came in and told ministers things they didn’t want to hear” (cited in Attwood, 2009: 34).

Despite my earlier findings (Brown, 2009); Lavis *et al.* (2003), Paisley (1993) and Levin (2004) all note that, in the main, researchers are currently broadening their dissemination efforts via more extensive use of websites and are only concentrating to a lesser extent on more active strategies such as researcher/practitioner workshops. This may be because there is a general belief that the ubiquity of the internet, and the familiarity with it by the general populus, broadly aids efforts to make research findings more available and accessible (Eurydice Network, 2007). This suggests that scope exists to further investigate how policy-makers perceive face-to-face communication as

a medium of communication. It also suggests that there exists the potential for exploring which of the passive media channels (email, websites, posters, literature, seminars etc) best help to reinforce the messages being communicated and why. In addition, there may also be a need to investigate which method of communication best helps to deliver personalised and tailored messages or the required level of detail. Finally, scope also exists in terms of exploring which methods of communication are most likely to lead to additional demand for the information to be communicated.

### **3.2.4 – The level of proactivity, contextualization and tailoring undertaken by researchers**

Levin (2004) notes the paucity of consensus that exists within educational research: in other words, findings from research studies can often conflict and, as a result, policy-makers should be provided with the full range of evidence-informed options for policies. As a result, research findings should therefore be contextualized by and shown to relate to other evidence within the field. This notion of contextualization (which, in part, also encompasses the core purpose underpinning the process of systematic review) has been reaffirmed and expanded upon in other studies. In Campbell *et al.* (2007), for instance, policy-makers expressed a desire for research findings to be positioned in relation to existing work so that any given study's contribution to the wider field could be identified. Wolter *et al.* (2002), on the other hand, address the situation epistemologically, maintaining that the usefulness of educational research partly stems from the different "ways of knowing and seeing, of different cognitive, theoretically and framed textures. We first have to recognize different forms of knowledge [and then] make attempts to relate them". Thus Wolter *et al.* contend that it is the role of educational researchers to link existing, disparate, evidence types together and to provide an understanding of how this evidence can be utilized or interpreted.

In Brown (2009) I suggest that research contextualisation occurs as part of a wider suite of proactive interactions between government researchers and policy-makers. For instance, the majority of government researchers I interviewed provided examples of proactively engaging policy-makers in order to interest them in the findings of research: researchers made attempts to anticipate or understand the needs of policy-makers in a timely way and then tailor and/or position findings so that they had more relevance to a given policy setting or context; they provided explanations as to how available evidence was related or could be linked together; policy-makers were also aided in

interpreting evidence that employed different approaches or methods. All of these actions were welcomed by their policy making audience.

Lavis *et al.* (2003) links contextualisation to the tailoring of content. They conclude that all audiences for a particular piece of evidence, as well as the environments in which they operate and the decisions for which they are responsible, must be well defined and understood in advance of any communication. Any findings to be delivered to that audience should then be suitably tailored. Likewise, Hillage *et al.* (1998) argue that researchers should identify the most appropriate audiences for their work and target those audiences accordingly, with Court and Young (2003) suggesting that an effective communication strategy should be developed and implemented throughout the research process. Tailoring is not always viewed positively; Swift (2001) argues, for instance, that academics or research providers must be clear as to what is being tailored and why. Swift also contends that researchers must not allow the constraints of practicality to 'infect' their beliefs or principles, or as Winch (2001) notes, their integrity. In other words, Swift (2001) maintains that too much tailoring is ultimately political and simply leads to policy-makers hearing what they want to hear. Nonetheless, in Brown (2009) I maintain that for researchers working within government, the ability to proactively provide research and to effectively contextualize and tailor that research should be seen as prerequisite criteria in order for them to be able to carry out their role effectively.

Whilst proactivity may be appropriate for government researchers it will be less so for academics. For example, from a Foucaultian perspective, proactivity may be seen to compel academic researchers who wish to help solve problems or issues to structure the timing and nature of their work to the agenda of government. This then precludes such researchers from developing open relationships with policy-makers and in delivering messages which provide challenge and help steer policy in new directions (Troyna, 1994; Ball, 1997; Mortimore, 2000). My conclusion in Brown (2009) was to suggest that academic researchers should in fact attempt to be 'proactive criticsers', that is, to proactively schedule work so that government policy can be critically analysed in a timely, accessible and rigorous way, which might then lead to policy developments being formed on the basis of such criticisms. This may occur through such knowledge being traded within the agora, or used in a way that leads to shifts in the paradigms that form it.

Pestieau (2003) contends that policy-makers seldom signal their need for research

findings in advance of developing a particular initiative. Potentially this problematises my notion of 'proactive criticism'; I suggest at a macro level, however, that indications of the direction or nature of policy intentions are often provided, primarily within the manifestos of political parties or through the legislative programmes of incumbent governments. Thus, I believe it is feasible to suggest that researchers may be able to interpret such signals and, should they wish, act upon them by prioritising their work accordingly. An example of researchers behaving in such a way can be found in Kirst (2000). Here one organisation; Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), representing a coalition of University research providers in California, scheduled the production of evidence and the analysis of policy around issues that were predicted to be of concern to state legislators over a 1 – 2 year time frame. Kirst (2000) also illustrates how PACE selected its menu of policy analyses based on interviews with policy-makers before the commencement of California's annual legislative cycle.

The notion that academic researchers should attempt to be 'proactive criticsers' is also reiterated by a number of authors. Both Council for Science and Technology (2008) and Davies (2007) note that a key function of academia is to raise questions as much as it is to answer or solve problems. Taylor (2005) suggests that researchers should be permanently ready to take advantage of the political or ideological zeitgeist. Pestieau (2003) argues that the challenge for researchers is to be alert to potential opportunities which may arise as a result of political or economic events. Cohn (2006) meanwhile suggests that proactive criticism, when taken to its macro extreme, may involve academics seeking to form alliances with other key stakeholders to form 'advocacy coalitions' centred around particular areas of interest or concern. Finally, Pollard and Oancea (2010) recommend that, for their part, government should support and should be responsive to any such efforts on the part of academics.

Consequently, it is argued that it is imperative that researchers employed by government proactively provide tailored and contextualised research to policy-makers in order to help create the platform upon which they can inform their decisions. For academic researchers wishing to enter the policy debate, however, it is suggested that the most effective way to do so is by ensuring that such researchers are able to critically analyse policy in a timely, accessible and rigorous way. Further analysis is required on this latter point, however, in order to determine whether the concept of proactive criticism is both desirable and possible (from the view point of policy-makers and academics).

### **3.3 – Factors providing context to the process of knowledge adoption**

In addition to those factors which affect the communication and reception of knowledge, there are also two factors that have emerged from my literature review which appear to provide context to the overall process of knowledge adoption. As such, these factors are likely to impact on both the efficacy of the knowledge adoption process and the likelihood of its success. These factors are: whether the research to be communicated sits within a synthesized wider corpus of knowledge which is considered to be socially robust, and whether the knowledge provider is privileged or highly regarded by policy-makers (or the organization within which policy makers operate).

#### **3.3.1 – The impact on knowledge adoption of a wider corpus of ‘socially robust’ knowledge**

Gibbons (1999) suggests that ‘socially robust’ knowledge will not only be regarded as ‘high quality’, but is also likely to be widely understood by society. In turn, I contend that ‘social robustness’ depends, therefore, on whether a given study forms part of a wider corpus of knowledge and on whether such knowledge is close to reaching its ‘tipping point’ of acceptability to both policy-makers and the general public (Gladwell, 2000). Levin (2008: 5), for example, notes that “the accumulation of weight of evidence over time matters greatly”, whilst Kirst (2000) maintains that the impact of any attempt to use knowledge to change the status quo will be greater if the messages to be transmitted are, themselves, reflected by a number of sources. Cohn (2006) also argues that policy-makers are influenced by ‘schools of thought’. Such arguments are reflected in a study by Landry *et al.* (2003) which found that it is consistent tranches of evidence rather than individual studies that tend to be most influential in the development of policy.

Ball and Exley (2010) argue that the notion of whether knowledge is regarded as ‘socially robust’ has also been affected by a shift in the types of research discourse policy-makers deem appropriate. Value, they claim, is now placed on simple, easy to understand messages, typically generated by an ever increasing number of think tanks. In other words, Ball and Exley equate ‘social robustness’ to the ‘ease of digestion’ of evidence and suggest that it is think tanks, rather than academics, who can provide the most digestible outputs. Commission on the Social Sciences (2003)

supports this argument by maintaining that think tanks, for some policy-makers, are now the investigative agencies of choice. In part this shift may be due to the communication strategies employed by such organisations. For example, Rich (2005) and Exley (2008) contend that think tanks are increasingly being staffed by those who are media rather than research savvy. Levin (2008: 19) suggests that think tanks now give “considerable attention to knowledge mobilisation – it is after all their reason for existence”. Campbell *et al.* (2007) note that amongst the policy-makers they interviewed, lobby and pressure groups were seen to be more skilled than academic researchers in writing user-friendly reports and in presenting key messages in concise and actionable ways.

Crucially, Haas (2007) notes that the media are happy to present think tank research as credible sources of fact, especially as think tanks were generally likely to display high levels of ‘media convenience’: in other words, available to provide last minute comment in relation to news articles in a user friendly but authoritative manner. This process then increases policy-maker exposure to their work. The ability for think tanks to act in such a way may be driven by the fact that such organisations do not have to compete for the funding that is allocated as an outcome of the Research Assessment Exercise and thus are free to write directly for the policy user without being subject to the same level of intellectual scrutiny as their academic counterparts (Mortimore, 2000; Haas, 2007). It will also be reinforced by any lack of capability on the part of policy-makers to digest academic research (Levin, 2004).

In addition to the factors affecting whether knowledge is ‘socially robust’, the extent to which knowledge has been synthesised will also come into play. Both Hammersley (2004) and Ouimet *et al.* (2009) note, for example, that the ‘rational’ assumptions made in past models of research adoption, such as that all relevant sources of all information are searched by policy-makers, have now been broadly rejected. Thus a synthesis of research findings helps ensure that policy-makers are able to assess the extent to which there is a weight of evidence for a given view point, whilst reflecting the notion that they may not always cast their net too widely to find it.

### **3.3.2 – The impact on knowledge adoption of whether the knowledge provider is privileged by policy-makers or the organization within which they operate**

As alluded to in sub-section 3.3.1 (p. 67), there are many more potential contributors to policy discourses than academics (Davies, 2007; Council for Science and Technology, 2008; Ball and Exley, 2010). These alternative potential sources of policy influence appear to be increasing over time: Davies *et al.* (2000: 1), for instance, observe that: “a striking change in government in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the massive rise in the number of organisations seeking to explicitly advise or influence governments in their actions”. In part, this trend may be understood as being driven by shifts in the production of knowledge from ‘Mode 1’ to ‘Mode 2’: Gibbons *et al.* (1994), Gibbons (1999) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003), for example, argue that a key characteristic of ‘Mode 2’ knowledge is that improvements in communication media have led to a breakdown of existing hierarchies between academic and non academic knowledge. This breakdown has allowed non-academic ‘research’ organisations (such as think tanks) promptly and easily to publish and market their work and enabled them to quickly bring it to the attention of decision makers. Stronach and MacLure (1997: 89) argue, however, that these changes are the result of reform, the purpose of which has been to shift educational debate away from traditional ‘oligarchical’ arenas such as academia, to a more open debate controlled by “politicians, right-wing ideologues and media pundits”. Ball (2008) too suggests that New Labour had often sought to bring in new policy participants into the policy making process providing new social actors through which policy discourses might be validated. At the same time Ball (2008), Exley, (2008) and Ball and Exley (2010) also argue that established actors or institutions (such as academics and universities) have been systematically ignored or down-graded in terms of the value of their contribution.

The relative likelihood of success amongst those attempting to influence policy is reflected in Davies’ (2006) conception of a policy ‘food-chain’. The ‘food chain’ is a result of data collected from a Cabinet Office survey of politicians and other policy-makers (Campbell *et al.*, 2007) and has been used by Davies to construct a hierarchy of who it is policy-makers are likely to be influenced by. The ‘pecking’ order is as follows (Davies, 2006: 9):<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Exley (2008) suggests that above Special Advisors sit the Prime Minister and the PM’s Delivery Unit.



- Special Advisors
- Experts
- Professional Associations
- Think Tank Opinion Formers
- Lobbyists and Pressure Groups
- Media
- Constituents, Consumers and Users
- Academic Research

It is clear from this list that academics and academic research sit at the bottom of the chain in terms of the privilege afforded to them by policy-makers (and that this reflects an unequal distribution of power between these two groups). This view of academics corresponds with Rigby's (2005) study of research mediators within the US. Rigby's findings suggest that policy-makers relied on three sources of information: commissions, gurus and think tanks, which, Rigby argues, are exclusively practical, narrow or politically driven, respectively. Rich (2005) also confirms that in the US little influence is afforded to academics.

Davies' (2006) concept of a policy 'food chain' has been expanded upon by others. Ball (2008a) provides a complex explanation of how education policy developed at the top of the chain, suggesting that there is now a significant overlap between politicians, government advisors and key figures operating within think tanks. Such overlap, Ball (2008a) contends, represents a redistribution in terms of those able to influence policy and consequently, has involved a move towards a new type of 'experimental' or 'strategic' governance centring on relationships based around networks of new policy communities. Ball and Exley (2010) suggest that with these new policy communities come new policy actors who, in-turn, validate new policy discourses and provide and enable new forms of policy influence, whilst at the same time attempting to deconstruct, de-legitimise or circumvent established policy processes and networks. The work of both Ball (2008a) and Ball and Exley (2010) would thus seem to indicate that at the highest levels of the policy making 'food-chain' sit networks of connected or interlinked individuals who, since the 1980s, have developed a direct steer on education policy, whilst simultaneously displaying ambivalence towards most academics and academic research.

Cohn (2006) builds on Davies' (2006) suggestions by arguing that between academic researchers and policy-makers sit a 'third community' whose role or purpose is to use existing research and evidence in order to produce and disseminate analyses that are useful to decision makers. Cohn argues that in the public sector, the third community comprises government researchers, policy advisors and others, such as task forces, committees and commissions. Within the private sector, Cohn contends, the third community consists of members of think tanks, consultancies, researchers working for political parties and so on. Cohn also argues that when academic researchers engage with members of the third community (either within their role as an academic or through joining the third community by accepting policy advisor positions within government departments or think tanks) they are afforded more power by policy-makers and so vastly improve their chances of influencing public policy.

The nature of those operating within Cohn's (2006) 'third community' is expanded upon by Levin (2004), who suggests that knowledge adoption is mediated through third party mechanisms such as the media or other stakeholders including charities and unions. Nutley *et al.* (2002) note that 'change agents', social operatives who bridge the gap between knowledge producers and knowledge acquirers, also act as important catalysts in the adoption process by reducing impediments to adoption. Similar roles to that of Nutley *et al.*'s (2002) 'change agent' have, in different studies, also been explicated in different ways. Ward *et al.* (2009), for example, outline the role of 'knowledge brokers' and describe their primary purpose as making the realms of research and policy 'more accessible' to each other. Sin (2008) too employs the term 'knowledge broker' and, in doing so, argues that the principal role of the broker is to encourage research use through the successful translation of findings.

Sin (2008) also outlines five key roles that may be held by such 'change agents' or 'knowledge brokers'. These are: 'cross-pollinators' - intermediaries who have contacts in a number of sectors and use these to share and disseminate useful information; 'matchmakers' - 'brokers' who bring knowledge creators and knowledge users together; 'translators and processors' - intermediaries who interpret and adapt information from one sector so that it is clear and useful to another sector; intermediaries who use 'multiple dissemination routes' – that is, those who employ different strategies to get new knowledge put into practice and intermediaries who consider themselves to be 'articulators of user perspectives' - those who both pass on new knowledge and also bring back information on users' needs and help users identify the kind of information they are looking for.

Another key member of Cohn's third community is the government researcher: most central policy making bodies have attempted to solve Lagemann's (2008) issue of research 'translation' by employing permanent researchers as intermediate agencies that sit between the worlds of academe and policy, while attempting to speak the language of both. I argue that the origin, role and nature of researchers can be initially divided into whether they are situated 'outside of' or 'alongside to' policy-makers (Brown, 2009). In the case of the DfE and its Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), 'alongside to' refers to those researchers who are employed by the same organisation as policy-makers and who have a responsibility for exchanging primary research, produced externally, with them (i.e. they are commissioners and interpreters of research rather than the generators of new information). The term 'outside of' thus describes a situation where the researcher belongs to an external function or organisation, generating research 'first hand'.

It was argued in Brown (2009) that 'alongside to' researchers (particularly those at higher management grades) have better means of access to and are typically privileged by policy-makers. As a result, they can quickly and easily disseminate knowledge to them (Nutley *et al.*, 2007). Government employed researchers are not unique in terms of being privileged by policy-makers, however. This suggests that it is feasible to expand the nature of this category to include any knowledge producer who can quickly and easily access policy-makers (either because they work with, or are favoured by them). I rename this group 'privileged' researchers and, as well as those researchers employed by government departments, argue that it encompasses a range of other policy actors; for example, those belonging to Cohn's (2006) 'third community', or those who sit at the top of Davies' (2006) policy 'food chain'. Also included can be those previously identified by Ball (2008: 104) as the "intellectuals of new labour". A possible list of such academics and members of think tanks regarded as privileged may thus include Anthony Giddens, Michael Barber, Tom Bentley, David Hargreaves, Charles Leadbeater and Matthew Taylor (see, Ball, 2008). I maintain, therefore, that privileged researchers have more chance of influencing and so having their research adopted by policy-makers than those who are not.

### **3.3.3 – The analytical level at which these factors operate**

As will be argued below, knowledge adoption is best conceived as operating at the level of the individual policy-maker. Conversely, the factors outlined above may be

seen to operate at levels higher than this: the social robustness of knowledge, for instance, is not something that can be determined by one individual, it is something that materialises organically at an organisational or societal level (Gladwell, 2000). Likewise privilege, with regards to knowledge adoption, may be viewed as akin to 'celebrity'. Foucault (1980) argues that, in terms of literary discourses, identification and evaluation are intimately linked to the reputation of the author. Authors perceived as higher in prestige are afforded more power, but power is also afforded to authors who are privileged. Privileged knowledge providers are thus individuals or organisations regarded by policy-makers as the 'ones to watch' (Ball, 2008). Whilst the process of gaining privilege will have started at one specific point in time, as the result of one specific event, and facilitated with the aid of individuals, by the time knowledge providers may be regarded as privileged they will have reputations at organisational and/or sector level. As a result, policy-makers as a group (or at least a meaningful segment of policy-makers) will generally consider it appropriate to listen to what such providers have to say, and the views of these knowledge providers will carry worth throughout organisations. This organisational reaction to a knowledge provider thus steers or influences how policy-makers at an individual level will be predisposed towards such providers.

### **3.4 – Summary of sections 3.1 to 3.3**

Sections 3.1 and 3.2 (pp. 44-66) examined the factors that influence both the propensity for policy-makers to engage with evidence and those that affect the effective communication of research. It is clear that some are under the direct control or are the responsibility of policy-makers, others are controlled by or are the responsibility of researchers. Thus researchers as communicators, who are interested in informing policy, are responsible not only for managing their research approach and the interpretation of data, but also for how they attempt to inform policy-makers about their findings. Policy-makers as audiences are responsible for the factors that impact on how evidence is received. I regard the factors relating to how policy-makers act as audiences for research as *external* to given research studies (since researchers have only indirect influence over them). Conversely, factors relating to how researchers might seek to communicate evidence are researcher controlled or *internal* to the studies in question.

In summary, the *external* factors described in section 3.1 may be regarded as:

- i. Inherent factors that comprise the policy-maker's knowledge 'mould' (Huberman, 1990). See sub-sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.3 (p. 46 and p. 47).
- ii. The perceived credibility of the source by the policy-maker (Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Campbell *et al.*, 2007). See sub-section 3.1.4 (p. 47).
- iii. General involvement by policy-makers in research studies. For example, through networks or other forms of user engagement (Gilchrist, 2000; Kirst, 2000; Watson *et al.*, 2002; Pollard, 2004; Davies, 2004, 2007; Sebba, 2007; Cooper and Levin, 2010; Rickinson *et al.*, 2011). See sub-section 3.1.5 (p. 47).
- iv. The perceived quality of the evidence by the policy-maker (Lavis, 2006; Campbell *et al.*, 2007). See sub-section 3.1.6 (p. 49).
- v. Access to policy-makers (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Levin, 2004; Council for Science and Technology, 2008). See sub-section 3.1.7 (p. 55).

The *internal* factors to be considered were set out in section 3.2. These are:

- i. The 'accessibility' of the message (Lavis *et al.*, 2003; Davies, 2006; Brown, 2009). See sub-section 3.2.1 (p. 60).
- ii. Clarity of presentation (Ball and Exley, 2010; Brown, 2009). See sub-section 3.2.2 (p. 61).
- iii. The efficacy of the communication type (Paisley, 1993; Mortimore, 2000; Lavis, *et al.*, 2003; Cohn, 2006; Davies, 2006; Levin, 2008; Brown, 2009). See sub-section 3.2.3 (p. 62).
- iv. The level of proactivity, contextualization and tailoring (Wolter *et al.*, 2002; Lavis *et al.*, 2003; Davies, 2007; Brown, 2009). See sub-section 3.2.4 (p. 64).

In section 3.3 (p. 67), it is shown that there are also factors which are *contextualising*; that is, they provide a framework within which the *internal* and *external* factors operate. I suggest that these *contextualising* factors are in operation, both when knowledge is disseminated within the policy agora, and when dissemination is geared towards attempts to shift the ideological or epistemological paradigms that create the agora. The first contextualising factor may be considered to be:

- i. The social robustness of the knowledge/the amount of evidence that currently exists in a given area and whether this has been synthesized (Gladwell, 2000; Kirst, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Cohn, 2006; Levin, 2008). See sub-section 3.3.1 (p. 67).

This is because if a study is situated within, or contributes towards, a wider and ‘socially robust’ corpus of knowledge, there is more chance that it will be adopted by policy-makers than if it does not (for example, if the study is a one-off, or relates to a subject that is lacking in social relevance). This chance increases if the research within this corpus has been synthesised and is readily accessible to policy-makers.

The term ‘privileged’ researcher was introduced to describe any knowledge producer who can quickly and easily access policy-makers (either because they work with or are favoured by them) and so encompasses a range of policy actors including those previously identified by Ball (2008: 104) as the “intellectuals of new labour” and government or ‘alongside to’ researchers. As a result, it can be argued that a second contextualising factor should be:

- ii. Whether the knowledge producer is privileged or highly regarded by policy-makers recognising that this changes over time (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Rich, 2005; Cohn, 2006; Davies, 2006; Ball, 2008; Exley, 2008; Ball and Exley, 2010). See sub-section 3.3.2 (p. 69).

Thus privileged researchers have organisational or sector level salience and have more chance of gaining access to and having their research considered by policy-makers, than those who are not.

In both cases these *contextualising* factors may be considered to be policy-maker centric: in other words, they ask whether policy-makers, rather than researchers, perceive knowledge to be socially robust, whilst also looking at who it is policy-makers privilege. *Contextualising* factors do not exclude discourse in the same way as the agora but do affect the knowledge adoption process. Their full impact is explored in figure iii, in section 3.6 (p. 80) of this chapter.

### **3.5 – A theoretical framework: employing Dowling’s Social Activity Method**

I maintain that most of the models developed to explain the process of knowledge adoption appear to focus primarily on the mechanics involved, rather than on the motivations and behaviours of the social actors who take part. In other words they omit

to explain why social actors behave as they do in relation to their adoption of (or failure to adopt) knowledge. It is suggested, therefore, that a better sociological understanding of why knowledge adoption occurs is of as much importance as an understanding of the mechanical processes through which it occurs. As a result, this dissertation will seek to construct and test a new model of knowledge adoption based around the idea of effective research communication/the reception of research as an interactive and complex social process. The proposed theoretical framework which I will migrate and employ for the purposes of developing this model is that of Dowling's Social Activity Method (2005, 2007, 2008, 2008a).

### 3.5.1 – An overview of Social Activity Method

Dowling (2007) claims that the development of Social Activity Method originated from his 1993 thesis, designed to conceptualise social action (where his approach was described as 'Constructive Description'). In his 2007 paper *Organising the Social*, Dowling suggests that Constructive Description has as its basis an anti-realist, meta-theoretical outlook. He also suggests (2008) that the theoretical antecedents of this initial development of his approach include Bernstein, Piaget, Saussure, Bourdieu and Foucault. These antecedents materialise when we examine Dowling's work to explain the differential treatment afforded to pupils of varying abilities by a UK School Mathematics textbook scheme (see Dowling, 1993 and 2007). In this initial work Dowling distinguishes between two fundamentally different forms of discourse. Dowling argues that these discursive types have previously been described by Bernstein as vertical (principled) and horizontal (commonsense) discourse and by Bourdieu in terms of the function that such discourses give rise to; that is, symbolic or practical mastery. Bernstein (1999) also notes that that Foucault and Piaget have, previous to Dowling's work, contrasted notions of 'abstract' and 'concrete' thought. Dowling's (1997) own contribution to this typology is that of the 'public' and 'esoteric' domains<sup>38</sup>. With regards to the teaching of mathematics, Dowling's (2007) concept of the esoteric domain refers to the notion of teaching maths for maths sake, while his concept of the public domain relates to the practice of the teaching of maths to cope with the everyday world. Whilst Dowling's development of his theoretical framework has progressed beyond the analysis of pedagogic approaches to maths, his underlying purpose has been similar to

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<sup>38</sup> In all cases these two types of discourse refer to i) an 'official' type of knowledge that might be taught at school (or administered by a similar organisation), is thus fixed in terms of who controls the discourse and represents a mastery of an institutional function (such as a curriculum) and ii) 'local' knowledge which may be required in order to participate in a community or applies to a given context and that anyone may access and administer.

that of this original example, since they require different social strategies to be explored and described in logically complete ways.

Dowling (2007) states that Constructive Description involves a splitting of the world into the empirical and theoretical. Transaction or interaction between the empirical and theoretical produces both a theoretical and an empirical language. The theoretical language relates to theoretical texts and the development of theoretical propositions. The empirical language describes and organizes what is seen in the empirical world. Dowling's anti-realist stance enables him to argue that the main concern of researchers employing Constructive Description as a framework need only be to find ways of organising the data they have generated in order to explain a given empirical setting, rather than seek any underlying true picture of what the 'real' world looks like.

Social Activity Method is described by Dowling as a 'species' of Constructive Description. Its theoretical language is sparse, with its key proposition being that "the sociocultural is defined by autopoietic<sup>39</sup>, strategic action that is directed towards the formation, maintenance and destabilizing of alliances and oppositions and this interpretation can be applied at any level of analysis" (2008a: 6). In other words the key phenomena of interest in the social world are the relationships between social actors. In particular, that these relationships are always in the process of being built or maintained and that, as such, strategies will permanently be in play and designed to either form alliances (for example, personal friendships, relationships with colleagues at work, the processes involved in getting agreement amongst leaders at a G8 or G20 summit etc) or oppositions (for example, bullying, more institutionalised forms of opposition such as sexism or racism or official oppositions such as the blocking of a bill in Parliament).

Researchers employing Dowling's approach are required to gear their research instruments and methods to generate data that can, as an 'end product', be organised into a matrix of 'ideal types' which summarise the strategies employed in a given setting in a logically complete way. Thus, for any empirical setting, the result of the analysis of any fieldwork will be a description of what strategies exist, the nature of those strategies (i.e. are they designed to form alliances or oppositions) and the state of those strategies (i.e. are they being built, are they longstanding, are they in decline etc). An example of how Dowling has used Social Activity Method may be found in

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<sup>39</sup> Dowling (2005) uses the term 'autopoietic' to mean a system that is self creating/self organising.



Appendix F (p. 242). Most examples of SAM tend to involve a 2x2 matrix of ideal types, examples of which can be found in Dowling (e.g., 2005, 2007, 2008a) as well as Appendix F.

One critique of Dowling's approach (derived from his earlier 1993 PhD thesis) comes from Bernstein (1996: 126), Dowling's supervisor, who suggests that the 'ideal type' analyses posited by Dowling are limited because they "cannot generate other than themselves". That is, they do not, by themselves, provide or create explanatory theories that can account for behaviour observed in other empirical settings. Bernstein also argues that, in addition, the criteria used to generate the matrices are not driven by mutually exclusive principles (theoretical or otherwise). In other words, a number of different forms of matrix could be used to explain the data.

Dowling (2005) responds to Bernstein's critique in a number of ways. Firstly he rejects the notion that theory plays no part in the construction of the ideal types, suggesting that any such matrix developed by employing Social Activity Method has to be conceptually coherent with the theoretical principles of SAM. Secondly, Dowling claims that Bernstein's own theoretical approach is structuralist in nature: that is, Bernstein's work posits the world as a system comprising elements which provide meaning, but that are fixed in their relative positions. As a result the nature of Bernsteinian analysis is also 'fixed'. As such, Dowling claims, Bernstein's theories do not always display coherence when they encounter the empirical domain. Dowling notes, for example, that because of the inherent structuralist 'limitations' to his approach Bernstein has, on occasion, offered "quasi-empirical illustrations to bolster his theoretical apparatus" (2005: 15). In other words, Dowling (2007) suggests that Bernstein's work is inflexible in terms of how his theories might be applied and it is thus difficult for researchers to relate the totality of Bernstein's work to empirical situations, particularly where such situations contain elements that are not 'fixed' in ways predicted by Bernstein. Dowling illustrates this through a detailed critique of the Bernsteinian concepts of 'classification' and 'framing' (set out in Appendix G; p. 244).

Social Activity Method, by contrast, overcomes such structural issues by applying the same conceptual framework to higher or lower levels of analysis through full engagement with the empirical. Its forms of description are, therefore, independent of

any level of analysis and SAM, as an approach, can be described as displaying a ‘fractal quality’<sup>40</sup>. In other words, as Dowling (2008b: 79) suggests:

What are seen as apparently substantive alliances and oppositions, including, for example, social class and gendered patternings, are interpreted as emergent at a higher level of analysis than that at which autopoietic action is being studied.

Because each matrix of ideal types is generated by what is empirically experienced, rather than driven solely by theory, Dowling’s approach can be viewed as one that is firmly rooted at the interface between the theoretical and empirical. Or, in other words, SAM’s external language (i.e. the aspect of SAM which connects it to the empirical) is very highly developed and has been described by Dowling, 2005: 18, as “a machine to help me organise what I see”.

### **3.5.2 – How Social Activity Method will be utilised by this thesis**

Despite the critique outlined above, Social Activity Method can be effectively used by this project. This is because the adoption of research may be viewed as an interactive process<sup>41</sup> and as Yaron and Shaxson (2008: 3) note: “interaction does not happen of its own accord”. Thus, the successful adoption of knowledge can be taken to represent the result of a fruitful relationship, or alliance, between policy-makers and researchers (with such an alliance comprising either a direct relationship between policy-makers and academics or an indirect relationship between policy-makers and the texts or work of researchers).

For this thesis, the factors or strategies that facilitate, hinder, add to or detract from the building of alliances are derived from the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed above. From this literature it is clear that some factors (or strategies) are controlled by those who are communicating their knowledge and evidence. These factors have been detailed in section 3.4 (p. 73) and can be described as *internal* factors. Some factors,

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<sup>40</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘fractal’ as “a curve or geometrical figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole”. See: [http://www.askoxford.com:80/concise\\_oed/fractal?view=uk](http://www.askoxford.com:80/concise_oed/fractal?view=uk).

Dowling (2008a) is using the term ‘fractal quality’ to suggest that the process through which SAM is applied is consistent and identical, whether the researcher is considering the behaviour of an individual or of society as a whole.

<sup>41</sup> Interaction may occur either socially; through exchanges between researchers and policy-makers, or via engagement with research texts which are subsequently interpreted and (re)contextualised by the policy-maker.

or strategies, are controlled by the audiences for the research and may be described as *external* factors. In addition, some factors provide a contextual framework within which these factors will operate or come into play. Social Activity Method therefore provides a way of simultaneously looking at the interplay between the *internal* and *external* (of the communication of research and the factors that impact on how research is received) and of the relationships and strategies developed to facilitate these relationships between policy-makers and researchers that relate to the process of knowledge adoption.

In addition, SAM also provides a level of analytical flexibility since it enables the researcher to address the occurrence of phenomenon operating at higher (or lower) levels of analysis than that which is being directly studied. For example the conceptualisation of the agora as a way of constraining what type of knowledge is likely to be adopted, or the notion that *contextualising* factors operate at an organisational or societal level can thus be incorporated and considered alongside the occurrence of knowledge adoption at the level of the individual. This flexibility may be incorporated, either by (re)applying SAM to address this new level of analysis, or by analysing and addressing the effects of such phenomena and using them as a way of situating the primary analyses. Social Activity Method thus helps to provide a straw man upon which to hang the design of the study and a means through which to analyse the findings of the empirical work.

### **3.6 – The development of a new model of research adoption**

This section now brings together the argument that the process of knowledge adoption is dependant upon factors considered to be *internal*, *external* and *contextualising*, with the adoption of Social Activity Method as a theoretical framework. As a result it proposes a new model to explain the process of knowledge adoption. It is also argued that, in order to develop the model further, work is needed in order to determine what strategies are or should be employed by researchers and policy-makers so as to negotiate the *internal* or *external* factors and to facilitate a successful relationship or alliance which results in knowledge adoption. In addition, that effort is required in order to explore the wider environment that might affect or shape knowledge adoption at differing levels of analysis.

### 3.6.1 – My conceptualization of knowledge adoption

I claim that by employing Social Activity Method, it may now be possible to conceptualise the *internal*, *external* and *contextualising* factors detailed in section 3.4 (p. 73) as key components of a new model to explain knowledge adoption as a process. The model is premised on my notion that knowledge adoption is a social function operating at the level of the individual project/researcher/policy-maker. It thus sets out the sociological factors I suggest need to be considered and negotiated by both policy-makers and researchers when attempting to facilitate the adoption of knowledge. The axes of the proposed model are determined by what, I contend, are the chief *contextualising* factors: whether the research is being communicated by privileged or non-privileged researchers, and whether a given piece of research sits within a socially robust, synthesized and typically wider corpus of knowledge. Defining the axes in this way results in a 2 x 2 matrix which outlines a potential situation of four distinct and logically complete possibilities or scenarios (or combination of *internal* and *external* factors) with which researchers and policy makers might be faced. The nature of these scenarios depending upon who is communicating the research and whether a study may be regarded as ‘socially robust’.

I now illustrate how the model outlines the factors that I believe need to be considered by researchers or policy-makers in any given scenario. For example, it has been shown that policy-makers are most likely to be receptive to ‘socially robust’, synthesised research, which typically sits within a wider corpus of accepted knowledge. Thus, the main factors for a privileged researcher to consider in disseminating such research are likely to be those *internal* factors associated with its effective communication. The diametrically opposite position is considered to be where a non-privileged researcher is attempting to inject brand new thought or ideas into the policy making process. Here, as well as the *internal* factors associated with effective communication, the non-privileged researcher might also have to consider relevant *external* factors controlled by policy-makers: how to situate evidence in order to create a demand for it (i.e. what are the inherent factors that will shape the audiences’ response to it), how the perceived credibility of the source can be maximised, whether the audience been engaged in policy networks or other forms of user engagement, how the researcher might demonstrate or account for the quality of the evidence and how they might gain access to policy-makers. As a result, it is argued that the process of privileged researchers disseminating ‘socially robust’ research to policy-makers, is

likely to be far less complex than processes associated with a non-privileged researcher attempting to inject new thought or ideas into the policy making process.

The same is also true for policy-makers: when looking to adopt socially robust knowledge from privileged researchers, policy-makers, according to this model, would need to set out their stall in terms of indicating the most effective ways or media through which it is best to communicate evidence. They would also need to be open to concepts such as proactivity and to work with researchers to help them understand the essential features of clear and accessible messages. For policy-makers to be effective audiences for new thought and to successfully engage with non-privileged researchers they might, in addition, also be required to think about how such researchers are generally able to access both themselves and their institutions or departments. They might also consider and remove (or help researchers negotiate) any hurdles have been unnecessarily put in place with regards to the quality of studies or credibility of the source. Finally, it is suggested that policy makers would need to respond positively to invitations to join networks or to partake in user engagement processes and programmes. In all cases policy-makers are ultimately likely to need to ensure that suitable mechanisms, infrastructure and types of culture or behaviour exist within government departments and agencies so that evidence is considered throughout the policy making process.

The model also highlights other, more intermediate positions: for the non-privileged researcher who wishes to communicate ‘socially robust’ research directly to policy-makers, all *internal* factors are likely be relevant, but only some of the *external* factors will probably need to be considered (in this case they might also have to negotiate direct access to policy-makers). Likewise the model posits that for policy-makers to act as effective audiences for privileged researchers attempting to inject new thought into the system, they will also have to be open to what the research offers or provides. These scenarios and strategies are set out in full in figure iii, below<sup>42</sup>:

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<sup>42</sup> Figure iii has been developed through engagement with current existing literature. Should new research detailing additional factors affecting knowledge adoption come to light, the model should be regarded as being flexible in its ability to accommodate them.

**Figure iii: Factors that affect the adoption of research**

	'Socially Robust'/wider corpus of synthesised knowledge	New thought
Communicated by privileged researchers	<p>'Internal' factors, described as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Most effective media</li> <li>ii) Accessibility of the message</li> <li>iii) Clarity of presentation</li> <li>iv) Proactivity, context and tailoring</li> </ul>	<p>'Internal' factors plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) How to create a demand for the research</li> <li>ii) User engagement</li> <li>iii) Quality of evidence</li> </ul>
Communicated by non-privileged researchers	<p>'Internal' factors plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Credibility of the source</li> <li>ii) User engagement</li> <li>iii) Quality of evidence</li> <li>iv) Access to policy makers</li> </ul>	<p>'Internal' factors plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) How to create a demand for the research</li> <li>ii) Credibility of the source</li> <li>iii) User engagement</li> <li>iv) Quality of evidence</li> <li>v) Access to policy makers</li> </ul>

**Key:** The four boxes that comprise figure iii represent the four 'knowledge adoption scenarios' that research providers are likely to face when seeking to promote their work to policy makers and that policy makers will face when attempting to take on board research. Within each scenario are listed the factors that will affect both audience and narrator. The top left hand scenario is considered optimal, as there are only four factors to be negotiated; the bottom right least optimal (9 factors).

It should be noted that the presentation of the model is representational only; the rectangles are used to illustrate the notion of a delineated space within which sit both research studies and the providers of evidence. In addition, that within the agora, studies and providers share commonalities in terms of their ideological and epistemological positions. As such, the precise geometry of the model may be regarded as irrelevant; the delineated space could be as equally well represented by circles or, indeed, by any other two, two-dimensional shapes. In addition, the borders

which delineate this space are not considered to be permanently fixed: the nature of the agora may shift (see section 2.7.1; p. 39); however, where there is no hard or fast distinctions between the ideologies of those in power and those in opposition these borders might also be regarded as 'porous'. This allows for the possibility of ideological 'blurring' as ideas or opinions are appropriated or shared by both those policy makers in government and in opposition.

### **3.6.2 – How my model adds to current understanding and conceptualizations of what knowledge adoption is and how it operates**

It is proposed that figure iii, as it is currently presented, already moves beyond earlier models of knowledge adoption (see section 2.6; p. 30, and Levin 2004): this is achieved by combining Social Activity Method as a theoretical framework, with the notion that the effective adoption of research is a function of factors which are either *internal*, *external* or *contextualising*. Social Activity Method, for example, provides the missing 'why': whereas existing models, such as *Demand pull* or that presented by Nutley in figure I (p. 34), represent knowledge as something adopted\transferred\exchanged through chains or flows and via mechanics, I claim that this type of representation is concerned solely with process. In other words earlier models do not provide the sociological understanding required when considering the motivations of social actors. It is my argument that knowledge flows come into being, or are aborted, are made to work, or are undermined because the actions of social actors are geared towards developing, maintaining or destroying relationships. Ultimately, as contended in section 3.5 (p. 75), knowledge adoption should be seen as the result of a successful alliance between researchers and policy-makers; thus to facilitate or engage in knowledge adoption, researchers and policy-makers will seek to build links with each other via the development of strategies or initiatives. SAM therefore may explain what drives the 'how' once the 'what' has been determined. In other words, it may provide the motivating sociological factors that lead to particular knowledge adoption actions or strategies being engaged in.

The 'how' of knowledge adoption is also further developed: in representing knowledge adoption as a function of both *internal* or *external* factors, figure iii illustrates the factors that researchers will need to develop successful strategies to negotiate if they are to communicate effectively or disseminate evidence to policy-makers and vice versa for

policy-makers attempting to act as effective audiences. At the same time, figure iii illustrates how policy-makers, who wish to develop policy without being encumbered with what might be viewed as inconvenient research messages, can seek to undermine any value research evidence might provide and so downplay the importance of an alliance with researchers - this means their actions are towards building an opposition or anti-alliance. For example, policy-makers promoting a 'deficit' model of research, that is, the view that it is researchers, rather than policy-makers who are responsible to the failure of any actualisation of evidence-informed policy (Perry *et al.*, 2010).

In utilising the *contextualising* factors that were set out in section 3.3 (p. 67), figure iii also illustrates how the actual communicator of the research and, correspondingly, their position with regards to policy-makers has as much a role to play in determining whether knowledge adoption will occur, as the nature of the research (i.e. whether it is socially robust or attempting to inject new thought into the system). As such, unlike past models of knowledge adoption, the model highlights the differences in complexity that accrue depending upon the situation at hand, rather than assuming equality in all situations. Accordingly it is suggested that knowledge adoption becomes easier when power is afforded to researchers (i.e. they are privileged) or power is afforded to the idea to which their research pertains.

Since each new study or piece of evidence represents a brand new situation to be faced by policy-makers and researchers, the factors set out within figure iii must also be effectively negotiated each and every time in order to ensure that adoption occurs. Likewise, if the same piece of research were to be applied to a new policy-maker, the framework would again have to be reapplied. In other words, if the scenario faced by the researcher or policy-maker changes, such change will need to be reflected in revised strategies in order to deal with any new constituent elements. Consequently it is argued that this approach suggests that the process of knowledge adoption should be viewed as occurring at an atomistic rather than at a macro level; that is, at the level of a single piece of research aimed at an individual policy-maker. An atomistic analysis also reflects comments by Rickinson *et al.* (2011) who note that it may be considered simplistic to see the policy community as homogenous in terms of its likelihood to value or embrace evidence. Similarly, it can also be regarded as simplistic to assume that individual policy-makers will treat all research as equally valid and so will adopt all findings, whether or not such research sits within the paradigms of the policy agora. Again, this differs from the way knowledge adoption is treated by current, existing,



explanatory models. Finally, by concentrating solely on the adoption of research rather than looking at its actual use, figure iii also explicitly highlights the need to take into account only those factors inherent to policy-makers adopting knowledge, rather than to consider exogenous elements likely to affect the creation of policy (Davies, 2004; Lavis, 2006). This is because most exogenous factors (for example, economic events such as recession or budget cuts) are likely to be beyond the control of any given or individual policy-maker.

Thus, it can be claimed that figure iii represents a clear and distinctive perspective on the factors that impinge on the effective adoption of research. In doing so it can be argued that the model meets the requirements set out by Cooper and Levin (2010: 15), who request that models of research use “move past formulations such as ‘research use is complex and multifaceted’, to describe that complexity and its component elements so that these can be analysed and assessed” and so, as a result, figure iii may be seen to move current understandings of research adoption to a point where “we can design and implement more effective interventions that target the areas that have the greatest potential to improve systems” (ibid).

### **3.6.3 – Further development of my model**

It is clear, however, that as a model, figure iii is not yet fully conceptually coherent. This is because, firstly, the model currently only illustrates the factors that need to be considered when attempting to negotiate the successful adoption of knowledge. What the model does not yet do is detail the strategies that are currently, or should be employed by researchers or policy-maker, in order to ‘overcome’ these factors and facilitate a successful alliance (resulting in knowledge being adopted). For example, from the model it can be seen that if a ‘non privileged’ researcher wishes to communicate ‘socially robust’ research directly to policy-makers, then they will have to negotiate direct access to those policy-makers as well as develop and realise a communication strategy which deals with the *internal* factors associated with the effective communication of research. The model currently fails to describe which access negotiation or communication strategies (or the inherent behaviours or factors underpinning those strategies) exist and which will be most successful in achieving knowledge adoption.

Strategies clearly do exist and have been touched upon within the literature review. Examples include the involvement of policy-makers with research studies through the

use of networks, or the development of the processes of 'user engagement' to increase policy-maker demand for new information. Similarly, improving the use of media to gain access to policy-makers or the use of knowledge brokers to help translate research and so better influence policy-makers also constitutes an adoption strategy. However, knowledge of these strategies, and their coverage with regards to the factors detailed in figure iii, is not comprehensive. In addition where strategies have been postulated, their success or efficacy has not always been empirically verified, or assessed relative to other strategies (Nutley *et al.*, 2007). This suggests that scope exists to explore and critically assess those knowledge adoption strategies which are or should be employed, in order to successfully facilitate this process.

Secondly, whilst I have posited that the occurrence of adoption materialises at an atomistic level, clearly the overall process will also be situated within and shaped by a myriad of environmental factors that exist at differing analytical levels. With the exception of the nature and impact of the *agora* and of the *contextualising* factors these have not been fully explored or their implications assessed. For instance, I have yet to describe, in detail, the impact of inequalities in power relations between researchers and policy-makers on the nature of the knowledge adoption strategies that may be required. Again this suggests that empirical analysis is required to further ascertain the wider environment within which figure iii operates.

In effect, as well as attempting to test the model, I am thus seeking to build an additional element (or to add a third dimension) to it. This will enable me to determine, more comprehensively, those effective alliance-building strategies that may be applied to the *internal* and *external* factors detailed in figure iii. In doing so I will also attempt to illustrate the current situation in terms of what strategies have been both successfully and unsuccessfully utilised, and which should be employed by researchers and policy-makers, when attempting to build alliances within the education sector in England. I will also examine how these strategies can or have been shaped and made problematic by wider environmental factors, such as differentials in power between these two groups.

### **3.6.4 – The interplay between the wider context for knowledge adoption and how the process of knowledge adoption may be conceived**

The literature review has now set out two models: figure ii represents the argument that a necessary pre-condition for the development of evidence-informed policy is to

understand how the dominant or favoured ideological and epistemological paradigms conjoin. This is because it is suggested that such a conjoin, or policy ‘agora’, (Gibbons, 1999; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003) outlines the gamut of research which policy-makers are likely to consider. Even for evidence residing within the agora, however, the realization of evidence-informed policy still requires the successful adoption and then use of knowledge by policy-makers - the agora thus represents an environmental or shaping factor that affects knowledge adoption but sits at an analytical level which is higher than that of the individual. Adoption itself is accounted for by figure iii, which represents my argument that knowledge adoption is dependant upon factors considered to be *internal*, *external* and *contextualising*, with the use of Social Activity Method as a theoretical framework. In order to provide a level of conceptual coherence to these arguments, Appendix H (p. 247) illustrates how figures ii and iii relate and interplay (both in, and outside of, the policy agora).

### **3.7 – Developing the research questions to be addressed by this project**

By proposing the concepts of the policy agora and its constituent paradigms, and a framework within which the *internal*, *external* and *contextualising* factors associated with knowledge adoption might be situated, I have begun to answer the first of the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis. Namely: “What factors affect the adoption of research within educational policy making?” To answer the second: “How might a better understanding of these factors improve research adoption and aid the development of policy?” I now, via the empirical element of this study, need to engage in a number of key areas. The first is to explore the face validity of the models represented in both figures ii and iii. In other words: do policy-makers and researchers alike believe that these models provide plausible explanations for the adoption of knowledge?

The model represented by figure iii also needs to be expanded upon in order to incorporate the strategies or behaviours currently utilised when negotiating the factors associated with research adoption. It is clear from looking at each of the four quadrants of the model, however, that this thesis could potentially assess a range of strategies undertaken in a number of different areas (strategies to facilitate access to policy-makers, influencing strategies, communication strategies, engagement strategies, strategies to create further demand for evidence etc.) by both policy-makers and researchers. This would undoubtedly result in an unwieldy study that fails to truly analyse any type of strategic behaviour in sufficient depth. Given, this I will concentrate

on investigating the knowledge adoption strategies which are employed by academic researchers.

At the same time, I will also begin to assess how policy-makers can better facilitate the process of knowledge adoption. As noted above, I believe that this subject merits a study in its own right, but an initial exploration into this area will provide insight into how the process of knowledge adoption might be improved. In particular by highlighting and critically addressing how issues of power influence both the actions taken by policy-makers and what is expected of academic researchers.

### **3.7.1 – The four questions to be addressed by this thesis**

The questions for this thesis are as follows:

- i. Does the concept of the policy agora accurately describe the wider situation which governs whether knowledge adoption is likely to take place in practice?
- ii. Does the interplay between the *internal*, *external* and *contextualising* factors in combination with Social Activity Method, proposed in figure iii provide a plausible explanatory model of the factors that affect knowledge adoption?
- iii. What strategies are employed by researchers in order to negotiate factors associated with knowledge adoption? Which are most successful?
- iv. What could policy-makers do better to facilitate the process of knowledge adoption?<sup>43</sup>

I now use chapter 4 to detail the approach and methods used to address these questions along with the epistemological and ontological perspectives that have informed these choices. Chapter 4 also sets out the issues associated with my choice of approach and methods, the empirical and analytical implications for adopting SAM as a theoretical framework, my ethical considerations, my sample framework and the tools I used to analyse the data that were constructed.

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<sup>43</sup> The use of the word 'could' appears to make this question more normative in nature than questions i to iii. The reason the question is worded in this way, however, is simply to reflect the fact that the emphasis of this study is on researchers and that the level of information I will glean with regards to policy makers will only be tentative and so will preclude prescriptive statements or recommendations for this group.

## **4 – Epistemology and ontology, methodology and methods**

Crotty (1998) argues that research comprises four hierarchically related elements: methods – the tools used to gather and analyse data; methodology or general approach - the strategy lying behind a choice of methods and which links this choice of methods to the desired outcome; theoretical perspective - the philosophical stance informing the methodology, and; epistemology - the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thus also the methodology. I begin this section by examining my choice of methodology and methods and explain the epistemological and ontological underpinnings that have informed this choice. In doing so, I examine the implications for my approach of my chosen theoretical framework and the analytical processes employed to make sense of, organise and interpret the data collected via my methods. I then address the issues related to my choice of methods; in particular those of reliability, validity and reflexivity and of my position as an ‘insider’ researcher. Finally I outline my proposed sample and the study’s ethical considerations.

### **4.1 – Epistemology and ontology**

Crotty (1998: 2) observes that the “justification of our choice and particular use of methodology and methods is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality we bring to our work... what human knowledge is, what it entails and what status can be ascribed to it”. As such, it is important to be able to demonstrate that the research approaches and methods we choose to employ are compatible with our philosophical stance. In addition that our theoretical perspectives are legitimised by our beliefs as to the types of knowledge which it may be possible to know and our views on the nature of social reality.

Dowling (2007) argues that his own theoretical framework (which is employed by this thesis) is built upon anti-realist ontological foundations and, relying as it does on the use of ‘ideal types’, is broadly interpretative in terms of its epistemology. That is, the matrices that emerge as a result of employing Social Activity Method are seen by Dowling to represent and organise only the data generated and any interpretation of that data, from a given setting. Dowling does not, therefore, utilise SAM to provide a factual snapshot of some underlying reality (Dowling, 2005). Dowling (2008b) notes however, that researchers of all ontological and epistemological leanings are free to employ Social Activity Method if they find it compatible with their beliefs.

My own epistemological perspective is constructivist in nature, but with critical shadings. Hammersley (1995) argues that constructivism requires a rejection of the existence of given, observable knowledge, whose validity is certain and against which hypotheses can be tested. Similarly, Geertz (1993) proposes a shift towards the study of communally defined subjective understanding. Geertz (1993) defines culture as the 'webs of significance' that we, ourselves, spin and argues that the analysis of culture is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning. Consequently Geertz (1993: 9) argues that what we think of as facts cannot be truly objective because they are really "our own constructions of other people's constructions' of reality". Thus it is my view that, unlike with positivist stances, meaning is not an objective truth waiting to be discovered, but instead is created (or constructed) through engagement with the empirical (Crotty, 1998; Robson, 2002; Dunne *et al.*, 2005; Charmaz, 2006). Constructivism forms part of the broader 'interpretive' epistemological paradigm and, as such, my epistemological beliefs tie in with those of Dowling (since I assume that the data that will be used to construct my 2x2 SAM matrix will have been created as a result of researcher/interviewee interaction).

At the same time, I believe that actual and perceived inequities in power relations and discursive control impact upon the perceptions of social actors and so will potentially limit or constrain their construction of social reality, or focus this construction towards a given dominant set of political beliefs (Foucault, 1980; Ball, 1994; Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1996). This means that I believe a critical outlook is required when analysing empirical data. For this thesis, assessing the impact of discursive control on the process of knowledge adoption involves, for example, analysing the implications of the policy agora, or attempting to understand the extent to which policy-makers promote a 'deficit' model of research.

Moving to ontology, Pawson (2001: 11), arguing from the realist perspective, maintains that researchers should aim to gather evidence with a view to developing an understanding of what types of programmes or interventions work, for whom and in what contexts. This understanding then provides a proto theory that can continually be refined through the analysis of the negative instance. In developing figure iii and in testing it empirically, my thinking may be regarded as somewhat akin to Pawson's conceptualisation of realism in that figure iii could be viewed as a mid-range theory, designed to explain the underlying reasons or mechanisms for why knowledge

adoption might or might not occur, in what circumstances and for which subjects.

My ontological perspective differs from Dowling since I am not an anti realist, however rather than view social reality as objective and independent in nature in the way Pawson does, I believe that it is commonly and jointly experienced through the existence of stable social norms and behaviours (Moore and Muller, 1999). My ontological leanings, therefore, are towards 'social realism'; an approach which grounds social objectivity in the practices of communities and argues that what communities regard as true should be considered as true (Moore and Young, 2001). In a sense, social realism builds upon the notion of radical relativism (e.g. see Dunne *et al.*, 2005) in that many politically related views of social reality may hold at once. However, unlike radical relativism, in a socially realist world these ideological ontologies simply represent frameworks of social 'mechanisms' that lead social actors to act in response to any stimuli to which they are presented (for example, in response to mechanisms of managerialism or frameworks of performativity etc.). In addition, what matters is not whether these ontologies accurately represent the nature of the social world, but whether we can predict how people might respond to policies or initiatives that relate to them (or account for why they haven't and refine theory or policy moving forward). This then, as a policy-maker, enables me to see the impacts of government without lapsing into 'naive realism' (Scott, 2000). Again this also enables my approach to be broadly consistent with that of Dowling, despite his anti-realist posturing, since I am interested in what respondents in a given setting perceive to be real, rather than the existence of any independent 'actual' reality.

#### **4.2 – The implications of Social Activity Method as a theoretical framework**

There are analytical implications, however, with adopting Social Activity Method (SAM) as my theoretical framework: namely, a commitment to the production of a pre-specified end product. This is because a key aspect of Dowling's approach is that the organisation of data from a given empirical setting should provide a summary of the relationships and strategies employed in that setting, and these should be displayed in the form of a matrix (see: Dowling, 2005; 2007; 2008a and Appendix F; p. 240). Dowling argues that the production of these matrices (typically 2x2 in nature) needs to be engineered in such a way that they present the empirical field as a logically complete set of forms of practice. In other words, the empirical data generated

for this study should ultimately be organised so as to describe the totality of the strategies employed by social actors when attempting to negotiate successful adoption of knowledge.

As has been detailed in section 3.6 (p. 80), as well as attempting to test the model, this dissertation is also seeking to build an additional element (or add a third dimension) to it. This will enable me to comprehensively detail the effective alliance-building strategies which can be applied to the knowledge adoption factors outlined in figure iii. Given Dowling's specified requirement, the resulting 2x2 matrix to be produced for this thesis thus not only provides a summary of the relationships and strategies employed by social actors, but also the additional element I require to complete my model.

### **4.3 – The methodology employed**

Originally, I had envisaged that I would use my empirical data to develop a case study. However, because the data collection process relies heavily on interviews (see sections 4.4 to 4.8, pp. 94-110), I felt that this would preclude the ability for me to triangulate the data, as required by the case study approach (further detail is provided in Appendix I; p. 249). Dowling (2008b: 73) argues that a characteristic common to general methodological approaches such as surveys, case studies, ethnographies etc. is that they "suggest certain regularities of method and/or interpretation, without necessarily constituting substantive theories about particular regions of the empirical field". In other words, specific research approaches or methodologies will determine or regulate the ways in which researchers engage with the empirical field and/or how resulting data might be presented. This implies that by employing a theoretical framework which similarly directs the nature of their empirical engagement, researchers can also, simultaneously, be regarded as adopting a specific approach: employing Crotty's (1998) definitions, theoretical perspective and methodology thus become conflated. In the case of this thesis it can be argued, therefore, that in addition to utilising Social Activity Method (SAM) as a theoretical framework, because SAM directs researchers to interact and interpret empirical data in a particular way, that it also represents a general methodological approach (a notion which is confirmed by Dowling, 2008b). As such I am able to state that I am undertaking a qualitative study, which has been shaped by Dowling's theoretical and analytical requirements.

It should be noted that there are no specific research methods associated with the use of SAM (although Dowling himself, has in the past, used observation and in-depth



interviews, e.g. see Dowling 2005, 2007). SAM may, therefore, be regarded as an approach which facilitate the organisation of data generated from a number of different methods, leaving the door open in terms of identifying the most appropriate way(s) to undertake the research. Consequently, this study employs in-depth, semi-structured interviews, rhetorical analysis and participant observation/personal experience in order to examine researcher and policy-maker strategies associated with the effective knowledge adoption. These are detailed below.

#### **4.4 – The use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, sample and detail on the interview process**

I begin by detailing the main method employed, that of in-depth, semi-structured interview. I also discuss the nature of and my approach to sampling and the analytical approaches harnessed in order for me to interpret the data.

##### **4.4.1 – The use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews**

In order to develop individual and in-depth accounts of the views of policy-makers and researchers/knowledge providers on the factors associated with knowledge adoption, semi-structured, in-depth, interviews were employed. Gibson (2008) suggests that ‘open’ forms of interview (such as the semi-structured approach) typically encourage an environment in which interviewee and interviewer interact to create both detailed and nuanced discourse. Fielding (2003: 136) describes the central characteristics of the semi-structured interview in the following way: “the interviewer asks certain major questions the same way each time, but is free to alter their sequence and to probe for more information”. Frey and Fontana (2003) argue that semi or unstructured interviewing can, due to its qualitative nature, provide a greater breadth of data than other types of interviewing. It was thus felt that the semi-structured interview form, with its qualitative, conversation-like nature, provides a greater breadth of data rooted in, and tailored to, the context of the interviewee and the interview situation. At the same time, that the use of common questions or subject areas enables a comparability of findings that can be been used to construct thematic summaries across respondents.

#### 4.4.2 – Sample

The empirical setting for this study is broadly defined as the site or sites of knowledge adoption within the education sector in England; in particular the government departments, academic researchers and other suppliers of knowledge that operate within this arena. It should be noted, however, that this thesis is only concerned with the use of evidence by policy-makers within central government; it is not within the scope of the study to seek or consider the views of local government policy-makers or practitioners.

Hurry (2008) notes that, when developing a sample for qualitative studies, because the sample size will typically be small (and certainly smaller than that required for statistical analysis or statistical generalization/representation), that researchers should attempt to ensure that a range of individuals are represented. Likewise, Brown and Dowling (1998) illustrate the difference between constructing representative samples and purposeful samples of ‘critical cases’, which correspond directly to the analytical requirements of the project. The purpose of this thesis was defined in sections 3.6 and 3.7 (pp. 80-89) as being the verification of the models set out in figures ii and iii and the addition of a third dimension to figure iii; to be achieved by developing an understanding of the strategies required to successfully negotiate the key *internal* factors under investigation. As such, my primary aim was to ensure that my sample of completed interviews comprised at least 20 critical cases, knowledgeable about the subject area under investigation, whilst also representing a mix of experience, roles, views and opinions. Robson (2002) and Cohen *et al.* (2007) note that with such purposeful sampling, the principle of selection is the researchers’ own judgement as to who should be either representative, or of interest, and so a corresponding sample drawn to meet these specific needs.

My sampling frame was thus chosen to ensure that the following groups/viewpoints were represented (although it should be noted that these groups/viewpoints are not viewed as being necessarily mutually exclusive):

- i. Policy-makers based in England and operating at macro or meso levels. This group comprises ex and current ministers and senior civil servants
- ii. Privileged researchers who actively attempt to engage policy-makers with new thought and ideas: that is, any knowledge producer who can quickly and easily

access policy-makers (either because they work with, or are favoured by, policy-makers)

- iii. Non-privileged researchers, both within and outside of academe: researchers who actively attempt to engage policy-makers with new thought and ideas but who are not in the position of being favoured by them
- iv. Academic researchers in favour of evidence-informed policy
- v. Academic researchers critical of the concept of evidence-informed policy
- vi. Those operating at the higher levels of Davies' (2006) policy making 'food chain' such as special advisors, experts and members of think tanks

Because my chosen theoretical field is broadly that of knowledge adoption, leading to evidence-informed policy, care was taken to select both advocates (those who believe that evidence can and should be used to inform policy) and critics (those who feel that for epistemological or ideological reasons, the concept of evidence-based policy is undesirable). This provided a wide range of views and opinions from which to draw upon and assess. It also provided a rigorous critique of my work and its conceptual/theoretical development.

In total, 24 people were interviewed for the project. Potential participants were identified in a number of ways and comprise three groups: firstly, those who according to the analysis undertaken as part of the literature review, were regarded as belonging to one of groups/holding one of the viewpoints set out above; secondly, those who according to my own and my supervisor's tacit knowledge/contacts/experience of potential participants operating within the education sector, fitted into these categories; thirdly, those identified via the type of 'snowball' sampling utilised by Polsky (1967), that is, via suggestions made by participants for other potential participants who might also fit the criteria above.

To begin the recruitment process, the email addresses of 31 potential participants representing the first two of the groups outlined above, were identified (in the main through internet searching). Email invitations detailing the nature and scope of the project (including the ethical considerations involved, although not the questions to be asked) were then distributed. Of these original 31 emails there was an immediate response rate of 18; 17 accepting the interview invitation and 1 declining it. Two weeks later a follow up/reminder email was sent to those who had not originally responded, this provided another 8 interviews (of which one failed to attend and did not respond to subsequent follow-up emails).

Hurry (2008) states that where small scale non-statistical designs are employed, it can be difficult to know in advance how many interviews will be required. She suggests, therefore, that it may be necessary to continue collecting data until 'saturation' is achieved. Saturation may be defined as a repetition of themes or ideas and, as Robson (2002) suggests, will be a function of three things: the scope of the study, the topic to be researched and the methodological design. Whilst saturation ultimately naturally resulted from the interviews/interviewees detailed above, it had been hoped that the project would also employ 'snowball sampling' to aid this process. Here participants provide links and introductions to other potential interviewees and thus further interviews may be undertaken until a full saturation of ideas, themes or concepts has occurred. One critique of this approach is that participants are likely to introduce bias by linking the researcher to 'likeminded' respondents, thus reducing the variability of ideas to which the researcher is exposed. On the other hand, the technique often provides a useful 'way-in' or 'gateway', where the researcher only has a few potential subjects to contact. Snowball sampling did provide another 3 names who were contacted and also sent reminder emails; unfortunately, however, this process didn't yield any further respondents.

The distribution of the final participants may be described as follows (note the number adds to more than the total interviewed as these groups are not mutually exclusive):

**Table i: Distribution of interview participants**

<b>Group/view point</b>	<b>Number</b>
Policy-makers based in England and operating at macro or meso levels (civil servants and politicians)	6
Privileged researchers	9
Non-privileged researchers	6
Academic researchers critical of the concept of evidence-informed policy	4
Academic researchers in favour of evidence-informed policy	11
Those operating at the higher levels of Davies' (2006) policy making 'food chain'	3

#### 4.4.3 – The interview process

At the beginning of the interview itself, participants were given a broad outline of the scope of the study and were reminded that their responses would remain confidential, that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time and were asked if they were happy to have their interview recorded. The interview then began with a number of opening questions such as job title, overall nature of work and level and nature of responsibilities with regards to policy or research. Each interview lasted approximately 25 to 35 minutes. It was initially envisaged that all interviewing would take place face-to-face. Ultimately, however, six interviews were held by telephone. In the case of these six interviewees, this process had the advantages of being cheaper and more time effective than travelling to see respondents (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). Arksey and Knight (1999) note, however, that telephone interviews, as an experience, differ from those conducted face-to-face since interviewer and respondents are deprived of non-verbal modes of communication. As a result this may prevent the establishment of a positive relationship with the interviewee. In five of the six cases I had an existing relationship with the interviewees (who were academic researchers and who I had met, worked or engaged with during my employment at the Training and Development Agency for Schools); telephone interviewing was thus not felt to be detrimental to the quality of the data gathered. In the remaining case (again an interview with an academic researcher) I felt that a good rapport was quickly established with the interviewee and, again, telephone was not believed to have impacted on the process itself, or the quality of the data. A copy of the interview questionnaire may be found in Appendix J (p. 252) and the consent form participants were asked to sign, post interview, in Appendix K (p. 259).

Immediately after each interview and before the data were fully transcribed, contact summary sheets were written up. As suggested by Boyatzis (2008: 51) the sheets were used to record initial information on: the participant, including their role, level of responsibility etc.; the main themes or issues raised during the interview; the research questions the participants bore on most centrally; any new hypothesis, speculations, or hunches about the 'field situation' either suggested by the participant or that emerged during or after the interview, and; suggestions for where I should place most energy during the next interview and what kinds of information should be sought.

Boyatzis (2008: 52) suggests that such sheets enable the researcher to capture "thoughtful impressions and reflections [and makes these] available for further

reflection and analysis". Thus the sheets were used to: guide planning for the next contact, for example to consider which questions to concentrate on; suggest ideas for empirical codes, that is, for codes which could be abducted from the data and that could be used later on during the thematic analysis, and; provide a reference point during the thematic analysis, for example as a reminder of ideas or the fuller context of the interview, to help with coding etc. The template used for the sheets may be found in Appendix L (p. 260).

The interviews undertaken were recorded using a digital dictaphone (an Olympus WS 110) and interview files were stored until they were transcribed, then deleted. A number of 'CAQDAS' (computer-assisted qualitative data analysis) packages were considered for this project. These included Transana, Nvivo and Atlas.ti. It was felt, however, that the most appropriate way to transcribe and code the data would be through the use of bespoke coding documents within Microsoft 'Word'. Doing so allowed me to allocate codes to individual lines or turns of speech, or larger segments of text, in order to visually depict (through colour coding) how codes related to each other and to produce coding 'maps' for each interview. In addition, each individual 'Word' document represented one interview; these documents could thus be quickly re-ordered, or interview text from a particular group of respondents aggregated into an overarching document, enabling me to spot visual coding patterns between similar or non-similar respondents.

#### **4.4.4 – The transcription process**

As Gibson suggests, the process of transcription should be regarded as more than the simple write up of interview notes or recordings. Transcription involves "analytic judgements about what to represent and how to represent it, 'choosing' to display or 'maintain' certain features of a piece of talk, action or interaction at the expense of others" (2009a: 31). Transcription of the interview data should, therefore, be seen as an initial but integral part of the analytical process, which firstly translates recorded data into a written form, then acts as a guide to that recontextualized data.

For this project, as noted in sub-section 4.4.1 (p. 94), in-depth interviews were utilized to develop ideas and an understanding of how respondents view the world, with thematic analysis subsequently employed to enable the development a broader descriptive conceptual framework (detailed in sub-section 4.4.5, p. 100). Consequently, my requirement of the transcription process was that it should provide an

understanding of the ideas and arguments that emerged from each interview, not that it should provide a detailed account of the (often complex) interaction between interviewer and respondent (this would typically involve the use of notation such as that developed by Dressler and Kruez, 2000, which provides the researcher with detail on the speech dynamics observed during the interview: for example, the length of pauses between speech turns, or overlaps in speech between speakers). As a result, I argue that it has been most appropriate to utilize ‘unfocused’ (Gibson, 2009a) transcription methods in order to ‘write up’ the interviews.

At the same time, because there is no objective or privileged position from which a researcher can undertake transcription, Bucholtz (2000) suggests that researchers should aim not for neutrality or accuracy, but for self-awareness and reflexivity (detailed in sub-section 4.9.1, p. 113). To examine whether ‘unfocused’ transcription is appropriate for a study, Bucholtz recommends looking at the effect on the analysis if data were re-transcribed in a ‘focused’ (or, as he describes it, a ‘denaturalized’ way). This was undertaken for two interview recordings, randomly selected from the interview schedule. The re-transcription highlighted interesting dynamics between myself and the respondents. It also raised the possibility that an alternative method of data generation might have been the use of researcher/policy-maker focus groups and, subsequently, the ‘focused’ transcription of the data to analyse or understand the dynamics and relationships between them, but it did not significantly alter the key messages that emerged from the interviews. Focused transcription was therefore deemed adequate for this particular project. As detailed in the ethics section (4.10, p. 114) transcripts were returned to respondents for comments. Only minor factual amendments were required to one transcript, however (dates, names etc.).

#### **4.4.5 – Thematic analysis and coding**

Thematic analysis was employed to enable me to identify the key knowledge adoption-related behaviours or strategies used by knowledge providers and policy-makers (these strategies were then subsequently utilised in the construction of the 2x2 matrix of relational spaces required by the adoption of Social Activity Method). Thematic analysis has been described by Gibson (2009: 18) as the development of themes through the analysis of data, the production of codes (which “pull together data from the various research ‘sites’... and enable the researcher to create general descriptions and claims about those sites”) and the examination of relationships between these codes. Themes thus provide a description of the transcribed text (e.g. detail what

broadly, generally, the respondent is describing or providing detail on) and are specific to the particular text from which they are derived; coding, meanwhile, provides an interpretation of these descriptions as the researcher begins the process of inscribing meaning onto the data (e.g. as the researcher begins to assess the higher order function to which any given narrative pertains): codes therefore apply to tranches of texts or themes which relate to similar functions.

The themes and codes were developed empirically through the breakdown of the data generated in the semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The reason for developing themes/codes on an empirical rather than a theoretical basis stems directly from Dowling's description of his theoretical framework: Dowling only provides a few clues and little detail when describing SAM to suggest how it might be used to marshal data into codes. For example, as stated in section 3.5 (p. 75) of the literature review, the chief proposition of SAM is that "the sociocultural is defined by autopoietic, strategic action that is directed towards the formation, maintenance and destabilizing of alliances and oppositions and this interpretation can be applied at any level of analysis" (2008a: 6). This, however, only provides opportunities to develop codes at a conceptually abstract level: that is, six codes relating to the creation, maintenance or dissolution of oppositions and alliances. As such, if I had solely used these six 'top-down' codes, it is unlikely that I would have been able to develop nuanced insight relating to the process of knowledge adoption (and certainly not as detailed as that which emerged from codes that I subsequently developed). That is, I would have concentrated on the end product of SAM – coding the data to indicate that a relationship had (or hadn't) been formed in relation to knowledge adoption, rather than focus on the strategies that respondents employed to develop relationships in the first place (which is of prime importance to this thesis). In addition, Dowling (2007) argues that use of SAM encourages a description of the empirical field to be developed out of engagement with that field rather than in a pre-designed way, or imposed in advance. Again this seems to direct efforts towards the empirical rather than the theoretical.

Empirical thematic analysis may be regarded as being synonymous with inductive analysis, that is, any data analysis precedes the development of theory. Theoretical development for this thesis began, however, with the literature review and has been augmented through the data analysis stage. My approach to the analysis thus corresponds to Mason's (2002: 180) definition of 'abductive' themes/codes where "theory, data generation and data analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process". As a result, Mason's (2002) definition accounts for the way I have



moved back and forth between analysis and the development of theory, detailing themes and constructing codes relating to knowledge adoption from the interview data, whilst also using SAM to guide this conceptual development (in terms of how the codes relate to the construction of relationships between policy-makers and academics). As part of adopting an abductive approach, as well as relating data to Social Activity Method, I have also related the codes emerging from the data back to the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 13-89). This is to illustrate not only how these codes augment or detract from the theoretical field, but also to provide an element of rigour and triangulation to my analysis.

I also, simultaneously, critically examined my codes in order to highlight issues of power inequality between policy-makers and researchers. Of particular relevance has been Foucault's (1980) suggestion that power stems from an acceptance, by social actors, of the reality with which we are presented. This is because one key insight that emerged from the findings is that policy-makers, and to a certain extent researchers, can appear to assume automatically that it is poor communication or the quality or nature of research outputs that hinders the adoption of research: correspondingly, that it is the role of researchers alone to make improvements to this situation. One academic described this as the 'deficit' model of research, and it was argued in section 2.1 (p. 13) that the discursive paradigm of research(er) deficit has been ongoing since at least the publication of Hillage *et al.* in 1998, or Hargreaves' (1996) lecture to the Teacher Training Agency.

In terms of this thesis, and the theoretical framework utilised, the deficit model may be considered problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, I claim that policy-makers are responsible for the effective reception of research, as much as researchers are responsible for its effective communication. This claim is thus incompatible with a deficit type point of view; although, undoubtedly, there is some room for improvement in terms of how some research is communicated or promoted (Mortimore, 2000; Levin, 2003; Gough, 2004; Lagemann, 2008; Slavin, 2008). Secondly, the primary aim of the thesis is to ascertain how academics might form effective relationships with policy-makers so that their knowledge may be adopted (with the suggestion that, in future, a corresponding study be undertaken for policy-makers). It will be difficult, however, to ask policy-makers operating within the 'deficit' model how academics might act to improve the process of knowledge adoption without simply ending up with a 'wish list'. In such cases, policy-makers are unlikely to have considered the implications of aforesaid 'wishes' for themselves, and so may make suggestions that require an

unreasonable amount of effort on the part of academic researchers but, conversely, little or no effort for themselves. Foucault (1980) notes, however, that change will only occur when new counter-discursive elements begin to receive wide attention. Hence it is only when studies like my own highlight issues and make problematic any such inequalities that they might then begin to be addressed.

#### **4.4.6 – The coding process**

As recommended by Boyatzis (2008), the actual process of coding was undertaken as soon as possible after the transcription of the interviews. This ensured that their context, nature and composition were still fresh in mind. The coding process was also informed by the maxim developed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006: 4) which states that a ‘good’ code will capture the “qualitative richness of the phenomenon”.

After the interviews were transcribed, to ensure that all relevant detail was captured, data were initially themed on a line-by-line basis (as suggested by Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Not every line was necessarily given a code, however, which is consistent with the approach put forward by Gibson and Brown (2009) who argue that researchers should look at the relevance of the codes that they develop throughout the process. Boyatzis (2008) also states that only the most relevant data should be coded.

Both Strauss (1987) and Charmaz (2006) suggest that when developing empirical codes researchers should start by considering phenomena such as ‘conditions’, ‘interactions among actors’, ‘strategies and tactics’ and to look for ‘in vivo’ codes; that is, phrases repeatedly used by participants. These factors were therefore considered, along with continuous referencing to the research topic/questions (and, of course, the empirical themes themselves), throughout the coding process. As the lists of codes grew they were abstracted into larger categories, which could then be attributed to larger numbers of occurrences. Ultimately the coding process led to the development of the codes used to organize the data as it is set out in the following sections on findings (chapters 5 to 7; pp. 117-181).

As well as coding, the analysis process also involved the production and writing of memos. Glaser (1978: 84) describes the use of memos as the “theorizing write up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding”. Boyatzis (2008) suggests that memos allow the researcher to move their data to a

more abstract conceptual level, which includes working through the key relationships between codes and between events and processes and codes, as well as other thoughts and propositions. Thus memos were employed to aid the overall analysis by recording thoughts and hypotheses as they occurred. Both Boyatzis (2008) and Charmaz (2006) suggest that the next part of the process of analysis is to develop propositions, which, they suggest, are coherent, formal and systematic explanations to reflect the findings of the coding and memoing processes. Again this process was undertaken with the resultant propositions set out in chapter 8 (p.182).

#### **4.5 – Discourse Analysis**

Potter *et al.* (1990) argue that discourse analysis is used with varying degrees of specificity and subtleties of theoretical inflection and in reference to diverse bodies of work. Potter and Wetherell's own definition of discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Potter, 1996; Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001) was developed to account for how people employ language to construct versions of the social world: in particular, how social actors structure their accounts so that they appear factual or serve rhetorical functions. Wetherell and Potter (1988: 171) argue that a range of accounts of the same phenomenon (for example, the strategies employed or required for the process of knowledge adoption) will contain the same "relatively internally consistent, bounded language units which we have called ... interpretative repertoires". Wetherell and Potter (1988: 172) note that "repertoires [can be regarded as] building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena".

My primary interest in the use of discourse analysis, however, is whether ideological or discursive control affects the nature of the interpretive reservoirs employed by policy-makers and knowledge providers. That is, Potter *et al.* (1990:207) note that "discourse is manufactured out of pre-existing linguistic resources". Discursive control may, therefore, influence these resources and so the parameters of discourse social actors are able to employ. It is argued that, to examine or account for this phenomenon it is therefore also necessary to draw from a qualitative technique known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA according to Gibson involves "looking at the ways in which language and ideology come to be intertwined, particularly within institutional contexts" (2009b: 24) and thus how political perspectives become institutionalized (Fairclough, 1995). As a result, Fairclough (1995: 1) suggests that the power to control

discourse and discursive events or practices is regarded as the ability continually to employ any given discourse and its associated ideological investments over alternatives, including beliefs that oppose the dominant view point. In other words, CDA can help researchers understand how power relations and the dominant positions of social groups, and their associated points of view, are produced, reproduced, legitimized (or made commonsensical) and maintained within a given social setting.

Fairclough (1995) formalizes CDA into a 'three dimensional' framework which proposes that analysis should be undertaken at three levels: the level of text; the level of discursive practice, and the level of sociocultural practice. Textual analysis looks at how discourse is drawn upon and combined in texts, analysis of discursive practice involves analysing how discourse is produced, distributed and consumed while the analysis of sociocultural practice directly involves addressing issues of power in terms of the roles of discourse in society. For this thesis I have employed a critical outlook rather than undertaken a fully-fledged (critical) discourse analysis, employing the perspectives of Foucault and Ball as well as those of Fairclough. This has enabled me, when examining the interview texts, to gauge and indicate whether interpretative repertoires (i.e. the language relating to the strategies that researchers do, could or should undertake in the adoption of knowledge) are affected by elements of discursive control or manifestations of power. These include, for example, the impacts of the agora, and the effects of any promotion of the deficit model of research. As a result of this outlook I highlight where such manifestations of power may be seen as problematic to the process of knowledge adoption.

#### **4.6 – The use of observation techniques**

As a current civil servant (with experience as a policy-maker and a government researcher, in both education and justice) it would be naïve not to acknowledge that my own experience will be utilized as part of the data gathering and interpretation processes. For example, the illustrations provided in this thesis relating to restorative justice come directly from my role as senior advisor for policy in this area. It is argued that the process of my drawing on what I have experienced (in terms of the actual practices relating to research adoption or policy making) can be informally described as participant observation. Gibson (2009c: 47) describes observational research as "examining the actual practices that people engage in... where the aim is to understand 'from the insider's point of view'". Polski (1967) notes that as a participant observer, the researcher should be aiming to enter the life-world of those being

researched in order to develop an understanding of life from, in this case, the point of view of policy-makers and knowledge providers. Thus, by utilizing what I observe and experience during my day to day role within the civil service I am engaging in and examining actual practice as an insider, whilst also gathering examples, vignettes and other data that relate and may aid the development of my thesis.

#### **4.7 – My position as an ‘insider researcher’**

Sections 4.4 to 4.6 (pp. 94-106) above also need to be set in context in terms of my position as an ‘insider researcher’. Rabbitt (not dated: introduction) suggests that being an insider researcher has advantages, namely that: “being familiar with the local culture and customs and having already established a relationship provides the opportunity for the researcher to gain participants easily and to be privy to ‘insider’ information that would not be trusted to a stranger”. Drake and Heath (2011), conversely, highlight a number of issues related to empirical studies undertaken by insider researchers; that is, doctoral students who are attempting to explore and critically engage with their place of work. In particular are power relations between the researcher and researched: in the ‘real’ or ‘outside’ world the researcher may be either in a more or less powerful position than those they are researching. As a consequence, there may be a need to negotiate and renegotiate relationships with colleagues, who are also participants, as the researcher moves between their roles as doctoral student and co-worker.

There may also be difficulties with insider researchers challenging colleagues within the interview setting and, in addition, there is the thorny issue of whether to act upon the findings: how and when to present critical material back to colleagues and whether data that might be profitably used to improve ‘practice’ should simply be left contained within the thesis. Also noted is the potential failure on the part of the insider researcher to achieve critical distance from their work-place: to fail to question the tacit rules and characteristics governing the working environment and the shared way in which members of their working community operate or perceive the world. Drake and Heath (2011) also observe that ‘insider researchers’ are likely to have chosen their project after years of practical experience of dealing with the issues they wish to investigate and so are likely to have a pre-conceived theoretical stance before the project has even commenced.

My position diverges somewhat from the examples provided by Drake and Heath since, by the time fieldwork had commenced, I had moved to a new policy making role (from education to justice). Rabbitt (not dated: the interview process) notes that, on occasion, the 'insider' relationship is disadvantaged since "particular pockets of information may not be elaborated upon, or conversely over emphasised. An 'outsider' anonymous in the community may be made privy to a differing rendition and provided with another perspective". The trick I attempted to perfect during the interview process with policy-makers was, therefore, to be regarded by them as an 'insider/outsider': close enough to benefit from understanding the life-world of those being researched, distanced enough to feel able to probe or critically challenge. In this sense I presented myself to education policy-makers (some, former colleagues) as a student from Sussex University who also had experience of education and the civil service more generally. Overall I therefore felt able to engage with policy-makers without fear that inter-interview challenge or that findings subsequently perceived as critical would adversely impact upon my career (particularly since my future career aspirations lie in the direction of academia – see section 8.8; p. 202). Dealing with academic researchers presented a different set of challenges, however. Here I felt that, because of my desire to embark upon an academic career, I needed to impress those I interviewed with my ability to critically engage, to critique or to add insight. This meant that the interview dynamic with this group was often a mixture of data construction and self-promotion, which perhaps led to a level of 'hyper-analysis' within the interview as part of the data construction process (whereas 'formal' analysis of the policy-maker interview data occurred post interview, during the process of undertaking thematic analysis).

In all cases it is also acknowledged that one of the biggest challenges of being an insider has been to make the familiarity of the policy making environment and its associated discourse unfamiliar and to ensure that I questioned rather than assumed the reasons behind why answers were given. My position as an insider researcher in conjunction with the research methods I have chosen to employ thus highlighted the need for reflexivity; both in terms of collecting and interpreting my data, and in creating my account. It also raised the need to employ measures of validity and reliability to ensure that my findings reflected what may be derived from data collected and not simply just my own personal beliefs and experiences (see sub-section 4.9.1, p. 113).

#### **4.8 – Rhetorical analysis**

Gibson (2009b) notes that rhetorical analysis, whilst no means common, may be

regarded as one form of discourse analysis, with a history that can be traced back to the work of the ancient Greek sophists. Rhetorical analysis is described by Gibson (2009b: 27) as an approach which analyses both “how people go about building, sustaining, interrogating or dismantling arguments” and the resources that are drawn upon by the authors of those arguments as part of their discursive process. Leach (2000) builds on this description to contend that the aim of rhetorical analysis is to discover why a particular or given discourse or ‘act of rhetoric’ is found to be persuasive, whilst simultaneously persuading others that this is the case.

In Brown (2009) I observe that *How the world’s best-performing school systems come out on top*, a report written by Professor Sir Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed and published in 2007 by McKinsey and Company was, at its launch, regarded as an outstanding example of how to communicate ideas to policy-makers. The aim of Barber and Mourshed’s report was to combine qualitative interview data, desk research and quantitative data collected by the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in order to provide insight into the factors that have driven performance in the world’s top performing education systems (as ranked by PISA). The report concludes that three factors have had the greatest impact on the performance of the highest ranked educational systems: ensuring that the ‘right’ people become teachers; appropriate professional development to transform those people into effective instructors and ensuring that the educational system is appropriately configured to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

This observation stems from a number of statements made by those I interviewed which, in summary, suggested that the physical presentation of Barber and Mourshed’s report enabled policy-makers quickly and easily to take on board the information presented. As such it was my recommendation that future studies in the field of knowledge adoption should endeavour to undertake a rhetorical study of *How the world’s best...* with a view to understanding its enhanced appeal and to determine whether any knowledge gained from this type of analysis might be transferable, and so used by other researchers seeking to influence policy. Despite critiques of both the report’s rigour, and the use of PISA data more generally (see Appendix M; p. 261), it continues to be my feeling that a rhetorical analysis of the study is and has been worthwhile. This view is compounded by Leach’s suggestion (2000: 207) that rhetorical analyses might be employed to “look at what can be done to make different forms of communication work better in context”. Potter *et al.* (1990) also note that discourses (interpretative repertoires) are always derived within particular contexts. Potter *et al.*

thus argue that attempts at any form of discourse analysis should examine the impact of context alongside any examination of how the discourse was made effective. As a result, it is my contention that rhetorical analysis provides an appropriate method through which to assess how Barber and Mourshed (2007) developed strategies to contextualise and present their findings in ways that policy-makers have regarded as compelling, and how the report's authors negotiated the *internal* and *external* factors associated with the effective dissemination of knowledge. My analysis may be found in Appendix M.

#### **4.8.1 – Limitations of the rhetorical approach**

Leach (2000) notes that rhetorical analysis can never be 'scientific' in nature, nor provide a universal understanding of why a particular discourse is found to be persuasive. In part this stems from the ad-hoc way in which the analytical framework for rhetorical analysis can be applied. But it also derives from the notion that the act of analysing rhetoric is very much interpretive in nature. As a result, its end product may be regarded as being shaped by the researcher's interests, background and their "socio-historical locations" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 16). Leach (2000) argues that, as such, the language of the analysis should be normative in nature so as not to confuse description with prescription. Leach also contends that such normativity is unlikely to appeal to researchers wishing to generalise beyond the case in hand.

It is my argument, however, that an element of generalization (albeit 'fuzzy' in nature; Bassey, 1999) may be achieved by making suggestions for what might comprise the successful knowledge adoption strategies utilised by Barber and Mourshed, then assessing the face validity of these suggestions amongst those interviewed as part of the study. In a sense, therefore, the 'success' of my analysis should be measured by my own rhetorical skills and whether my findings ring true with both readers and those interviewed.

#### **4.8.2 – The analysis framework**

As noted above, Leach (2000) provides a comprehensive analytical framework through which to structure rhetorical analyses. In doing so, she argues that only individual elements of the framework need be utilised, with the elements employed depending on what is seen to best fit the discourse in question. In undertaking my analysis, I utilised



two key elements from Leach's framework: exigence and pathos. Here exigence relates to the context in which the relevant discourse is situated and includes notions such as the timeliness and/or the appropriateness of the said discourse. Pathos is taken to mean how discourse may be found appealing and the thoughts and emotions it invokes.

As can be seen in Appendix M (p. 261), use of these two key elements enabled me to illustrate how Barber and Mourshed utilised specific strategies in order to ensure that the McKinsey report was contextualised by the needs/desires of, and suitably appealed to, their policy making audience. In particular, to illustrate how the authors' use of language and, importantly, appropriate coding and signalling ensured that policy-makers were keen to adopt the information provided.

The analysis also provided two themes which were subsequently explored during the interview process. The first is the use of appropriate discursive styles: the discursive style employed by Barber and Mourshed was seen to be akin to that of formal scientific or academic discourses which have been 'translated' as they move from the academic or scientific community to the popular press (Fahnestock, 1986). The interviews were thus used to explore whether such a style (i.e. one similar in nature to the types of publications frequently read by policy-makers such as that of *The Economist*, *New Scientist*, or *New Statesman*) is regarded as appropriate by policy-makers and how it might be facilitated. The second theme is the use of coding and signalling: in the interviews, I also explored how appropriate use of coding and signalling might help researchers flag their work to policy-makers in a way that suggests relevance and aspects of proactivity.

#### **4.9 – Reliability and validity**

Dunne *et al.* (2005: 85) note, with regards to small-scale qualitative studies, that:

Trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, authenticity, and impetus to action [provide the qualitative equivalents of] validity, reliability and objectivity but still indicate a commitment to good science.

Dunne *et al.*'s (2005) criteria are derived from the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), who argue that the 'trustworthiness' of a research study is the most important factor in evaluating its 'worth'. Lincoln and Guba contend that establishing the trustworthiness of any given study involves the consideration of four key elements:

- Credibility: how confident can we be in the 'truth' of the findings (which equates to validity in positivist research)?
- Transferability: is it possible to illustrate how the findings may be applicable to other contexts?
- Dependability: do the findings exhibit elements of consistency, could the study be repeated and still achieve the same results (which equates to reliability)?
- Confirmability: can we establish the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest?

Lincoln and Guba (1995) also suggest a number of techniques for addressing credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. These are set out below:

- Prolonged engagement or spending significant time engaging with social actors within the empirical setting in order to learn or understand the culture, social environment, or phenomenon of interest
- Persistent observation to facilitate the identification of the characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem and to focus on them in detail
- Triangulation, through the use of multiple data sources in order to produce rounded and nuanced understanding
- Academic peer debriefing in order to help uncover taken for granted biases, perspectives and assumptions on the part of the researcher (particularly if they are 'insider' researchers)
- Negative case analysis. This involves searching for and analyzing aspects of the data which fail to support current explanations or emergent theories
- Referential adequacy or applying current explanations or emergent theories to unanalyzed data
- Member-checking. Here interpretations and conclusions are tested with those who participated within the study, and;
- Audits. External audits involve a peer review of both the research process and the study's end product of the research study. Thus, the result of a peer review should indicate whether or not the findings, interpretations and

conclusions are supported by the data.

In applying these to my study, it is argued that the processes of 'prolonged engagement' and 'persistent observation' were underway both before and during my DPhil. This is as a direct result of my previous employment within the education sector and the scoping of the research problem through the identification of practices or behaviours within the government and academic organisations with which I have contact. 'Negative case analysis', meanwhile, emerged from interviews with those 'critical' of evidence informed policy.

Other techniques have also been addressed in a number of ways. For example, in terms of an 'audit'; as part of the research process I sought views from participants and 'outside' interested parties on the conclusions of the study and the 'route' by which they were reached. In particular, all participants were sent copies of chapters 5 to 8 (pp. 117-203), which detail my findings and conclusions, and asked to reflect and feed back on my interpretation and analysis of the data and the extent to which it resonated with their own experience. Charmaz (2006) notes that the success of such an approach is a direct function of whether my research study provides sufficient evidence to allow any interested reader to form an independent opinion and whether their opinion agrees with my conclusion: of the ten participants that responded with comments, all provided positive commentary on what was produced. In addition, whilst heavily dependent upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews, limited 'triangulation' has also been achieved by cross referencing interview findings to the literature analysed in chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 13-89).

I have also ensured that the interpretation and analysis of the data is as 'transparent' as possible and so seen to be rigorous. It is argued by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), for example, that the demonstration of interpretive rigour should include 'illustration' through the use of direct quotations and the direct reflections of the participants, which they suggest will increase the face validity of the research. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane also suggest providing access to raw data so that conclusions can be re-examined. The former has been adopted as part of the reporting process, the latter was achieved by anonymising transcripts and making them available upon request.

#### 4.9.1 –The need for reflexivity

It is also argued that any initial analysis of the credibility/confirmability of my own findings relates to how reflexive I have been in collecting and interpreting my data and in creating my account (Dunne *et al.*, 2005; Charmaz, 2006; Gibson, 2008; Gibson and Brown, 2009). Reflexivity and its implications for researchers and their work has been described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 16) in the following way:

Reflexivity thus implies that the orientations of researchers will be shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them. What this represents is a rejection of the idea that social research is, or can be, carried out in some autonomous realm that is insulated from the wider society and from the particular biography of the researcher in such a way that its findings can be unaffected by social processes and personal characteristics.

Thus, a reflexive approach can aid researchers to recognize that their interpretation of the empirical may embody values that they explicitly or implicitly (or unconsciously) currently believe or endorse. One example of how a reflexive approach can reveal challenges to the legitimacy of the findings presented relates to the dangers outlined by Ball and Batterson (1995) of researchers 'going native', and being persuaded to view the world as their participants see it. This, they suggest, is especially problematic when dealing with 'elite' policy communities, who they describe as:

occupationally manipulative, periodically selective and sometimes aggressively deceptive: appropriators of truth, facts, objective reality and recall *non pareil* (1995: 202)

Ball and Batterson subsequently claim that such 'elites', as part of their experience and skill at being interviewed, will be more than capable of throwing interviewers off track, employing tactics to nullify or invalidate lines of inquiry, to deflect away from questions to which they do not wish to respond, to engage in story telling, or to create an overall discourse of reasonableness and justification or legitimisation.

Ball and Batterson's warning is stark and during my interviews I ensured that I questioned both what I was told and what was omitted during interviews. As such, I constantly attempted to assess whether responses were being spun, whether the

interviewee provided responses that they thought I wanted to hear, or whether participants simply excelled at the process of being interviewed. This latter skill, Ball and Batterson contend, leads to policy-makers being able to easily create a discourse of justification which legitimizes their perspective fully and reduces the possibilities of any alternatives to the proposed 'reality' or solutions. In addition, as I note in section 4.7 (p. 106), reflexivity also formed part of my perspective as a conscious and aware 'insider researcher'. This materialized in my attempts to achieve the status of an 'insider/outsider': that is, to seek to benefit from my close proximity to the life-world of those being researched, whilst aiming to maintain sufficient distance that I might then probe or critically challenge those being interviewed.

#### **4.10 – Ethical considerations**

The main ethical considerations for this project are based on the ten questionable practices in social research set out by Robson (2002: 69) and on criteria provided by the Sussex School of Education and Social Work's *Research Ethics Standards, Guidelines and Procedures* website.<sup>44</sup> To begin with, the interviews were undertaken on the basis of informed consent: to ensure that respondents were fully capable of making accurate decisions about their participation they were fully informed in their (emailed) interview invitations and within the interview itself, about the nature and coverage of the project and its associated outputs. I also requested that respondents provide written consent to their involvement in the research and for use of the data generated. Participants were also asked to remember that since the interview was part of a research project everything discussed could, in theory, be regarded as 'on the record' and therefore used or quoted as part of the report. In addition, respondents were asked for permission to enable me to include material from documents or data generated from means other than the 'official' research interviews (such as from emails exchanged between myself and the participants) within the final report. Respondents were also informed about their right to refuse to participate, to participate without being recorded, to stop the interview at anytime or to withdraw from the research without consequence.

Confidentiality was assured by anonymising results, that is, by ensuring to the best of my ability that findings can not be traced back to individuals. As part of this process, when presenting verbatim quotes, interviewees are classified as either 'Civil servants',

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<sup>44</sup> See: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/research/ethics>

'Politician', 'Academic' or 'Consultancy/think tank' and a number allocated to each respondents (e.g. Civil servant 1, Civil servant 2... Civil servant x etc.). In the interests of accuracy and fair reporting, to protect areas of particular sensitivity and to prevent reporting causing harm or embarrassment to respondents, participants were also provided with the opportunity to review the transcripts of their interviews. This enabled respondents to offer feedback on any transcription errors or anomalies, or to flag up areas of particular sensitivity that were not to be quoted verbatim, attributed or possibly even discussed at all.

Finally, the findings and conclusions reached were verified through techniques such as triangulation, audits and peer review (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to further ensure that the study demonstrates credibility, dependability and confirmability. I also ensured that all data collection and reporting conformed with relevant legislation, including the Data Protection Act 1998, the Equal Opportunities Act 2004, the Disability Discrimination Acts 1995, 2005 and the Race Relations Act 1996, Race Relations Amendment Act 2000.

#### **4.11 – The interpretation of the data collected and analysed**

I now move from detailing the methodology and methods employed within this thesis, to presenting the findings I have derived from my exploration and critical interpretation of the interview data. These findings may be found in chapters 5 to 7 (pp. 117-181). A number of analytical aspects are presented within each chapter: firstly, a thematic analysis of what the interview data reveal about the process of knowledge adoption, and what strategies researchers may be required to employ to increase the chances of having their knowledge adopted. This utilises both Social Activity Method and the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 13-89); secondly, from a critical perspective, harnessing the perspectives of Foucault, Ball and Fairclough (discussed in the literature review and a more detailed discussion of Foucault is provided in Appendix B; p. 231), I set out what these strategies suggest about the inequalities in power relations/discursive control between policy-makers and academic researchers; finally, I provide an analysis of how these inequalities in power relations might make problematic the process of knowledge adoption.

Throughout these sections I have used a number of verbatim interview comments, selected because they best illustrate or exemplify points of interest or support particular arguments or observations. I have also attempted to indicate the extent to which

interviewees concurred (or the number that agreed or disagreed) with my arguments and conclusions. As noted in section 4.9 (p. 110), all participants were also sent copies of chapters 5 to 8 (pp. 117-203), which detail my findings and conclusions, and asked to comment on my interpretation and analysis; this process has added an additional element of face validity to the comments I have employed. This is because the positive feedback that was received indicates that respondents were happy that my conjectures and illustrative quotes reflected their own personal experiences. It should be assumed, therefore, that the comments represent a level of respondent (or sub-section of respondents') consensus on a given issue, unless specified otherwise.

It should also be noted that, whilst my conceptualisation and analysis in the next 3 chapters are all shaped both by using both SAM and a critical perspective (e.g. these have structured or determined the themes into which I have organised my data into, the verbatim data or vignettes I have used to illustrate my key points and how I have conceived my critique), I do not formally return to utilise SAM or Foucault, Ball or Fairclough as part of any higher order theorisation until my conclusion (chapter 8; p. 182).

In section 3.7 (p. 88) it was suggested that this study will address a number of gaps in the evidence base by undertaking research into four key questions. The analysis of the interview data, however, is presented by theme rather than question. This provides a better representation of the concepts that emerged from the transcription and thematic analysis/coding processes (the research questions are then returned to in the concluding chapter). The remainder of the study therefore covers the following three main areas, with relevant data, analysis and conceptualisation brigaded into each: Chapter 5 considers policy-makers' requirements of research (p. 117); Chapter 6 examines the issues faced and strategies adopted by academics when seeking to engage in knowledge adoption activity with policy makers (p. 148); Chapter 7, meanwhile, analyses academic researchers' use of contextualising strategies and the capacity of academics to engage in knowledge adoption activity (p. 171).

## **5 – Requirements of research**

In this chapter I consider three key themes that emerged from the interview data: policy makers' requirements of research (namely, that research be politically compatible and feedback constructive rather than oppositional in nature, whilst research methods or approaches need to be regarded by policy makers as epistemologically robust); that the purpose of knowledge adoption will differ depending on the 'type' of policy-maker involved (and that the adoption of knowledge outside of the policy agora may lead to the formation of future agoras), and; that policy makers have a preference for research outputs to be 'policy ready'. I begin by examining policy makers' requirements of research.

### **5.1 – Policy-makers' requirements of research**

In section 2.7 (p. 37), I considered the macro environment for the adoption of knowledge. Central to this contextual milieu was the conception of the policy agora along with the ideological and epistemological paradigms which come together to form it. The key conclusion drawn from conceiving the agora, its mechanics and its operation, was that evidence-informed policy will invariably be influenced by knowledge residing from within the agora, rather than by knowledge regarded as existing outside of it. In exploring this notion through the interviews all respondents agreed, suggested or concurred that policy-makers have two fundamental requirements of research. Firstly, that inputs (i.e. the topics of investigation) must be compatible with the residing political beliefs of the day and with the current direction of travel of policy; evidence should also be provided in a way that provides constructive feedback rather than oppositional critique. Secondly, methodological approaches must be considered by policy-makers to be epistemologically robust; for example, by utilising approaches that enable the world to be described from a 'what works' perspective. These two factors are now explored in detail.

#### **5.1.1 – The requirement by policy-makers that research be ideologically compatible**

In terms of political resonance, or the compatibility which might be ascribed to evidence or a particular study, it was observed by one researcher that:



I have a fairly sceptical and pessimistic view about the likelihood of any research I do having much of an impact on... policy making... partly because my views are not ones that are in line with the dominant ideology...

(Academic #7)

Whilst one think tank interviewee suggested that:

How we think about our projects, how we design our narrative around them, how we tailor them, would obviously be influenced by the dominating political ideology at the time.

(Consultancy/think tank #1)

Civil service policy-makers also noted that where evidence conflicts, Ministers will pick and choose, selecting that which supports a given perspective or policy commitment:

So we have the Charter Schools debate and it's a very mixed picture, but of course our Secretary of State naturally always alludes to the more successful Charter Schools.

(Civil Servant #6)

And that:

[the current Secretary of State for Education] is interested in systems that succeed in the world [but] he takes from them what he wants to.

(Civil Servant #6)

In addition, both academics and policy-makers suggested that those responsible for policy will challenge or attempt to squash findings which are seen to run counter to given policy, or even to undermine the academics providing them. One interviewee, a former government Minister, recounted the following example:

When we launched the... strategy [a respected academic researcher] came out and said that the... strategy was rubbish...[and that the researcher in question's own research undermined it]. And we'd not dreamt the... strategy out of thin air, we'd got [a second respected academic] to work on it and we felt that it was evidence based. And [the researcher providing the critique] made their announcement at a very difficult time for us politically. What we sensibly should

have done is to say “look [the researcher providing the critique] is respected, will somebody look at it and let me know what they think”. We didn’t do that, what we did was try and undermine it and never spoke to [the researcher providing the critique] again.

(Politician #1)

One academic respondent described the following two situations where particular evidence was seen to run counter to the government of the day’s beliefs and chosen policies and the subsequent reaction by policy-makers to this:

I had a couple of run-ins with [a former Secretary of State]... one on [policy 1] where we wrote to [them] and described the evidence which was very solid against [the direction the government were taking with policy 1]. And... we had an absolutely vituperative letter back... and it was about four pages of really angry prose about us being old Labour. Actually I mean I’m not even a Labour supporter so I don’t really claim to be old Labour. But it was quite extraordinary and obviously what could only kind of trip this is the knowledge that “actually the research might be right but I don’t want to hear it and I’m going to rubbish anybody who says so”.

And we also had a run in [concerning policy 2]... the research hit the headlines and it wasn’t just our research, there was a number of other pieces of research showing that [policy 2] didn’t have much effect on primary standards but obviously that was against the policy [direction]. So again you know I had kind of public dressing-down for that.

(Academic #3)

One academic respondent also felt that they had been maligned for attempting to provide advice which ran counter to current policy direction, noting that:

I am well aware that I was informally blackballed by [one government agency, because of the critique provided in a report]... of course I can’t prove that.

(Academic #14)

The need to remain ideologically compatible was also revealed through one respondent’s description of their attempts to maintain the relevance of their work (an evaluation of a ‘New Labour’ flagship programme) in a changing political environment:

We now have a Conservative government [sic] and they may wish to cancel our evaluation... so we have now repackaged our design and the way we talk about it and we say “this is not an evaluation [of the flagship policy], this is an evaluation of different strands of services... and what are the effects of different strands”... and we’re looking at the most efficient ways and most cost effective ways of delivering these services.

(Academic #15)

### **5.1.2 – The requirement by policy-makers that policy critique is ‘constructive’**

The findings above connote that any evidence perceived as counter-ideological will be dismissed out of hand by policy-makers. Some academic respondents, though, argued that even if evidence is politically acceptable, policy-makers are loath to hear ‘bad news’. For example, one aspect of the current government’s direction of policy relates to parental choice and the notion of ‘free schools’: schools set up and run by those not happy with their current provision. As the analysis above suggests, evidence which intimates that ‘choice’ or ‘free schools’ will not result in improvements in the achievement of children and young people is likely to be immediately rejected out of hand by policy makers. But academic respondents also argued that those providing bad news sitting within the free-schools policy context; for example, that such schools are not being set up in the areas that might benefit most from them, or that they are adopting exclusive pupil entry policies, will also find it hard to have the validity of their message recognized. Correspondingly it was felt that those most successful at having their knowledge adopted did so by adopting a “don’t rock the boat’ kind of mentality” (Academic #14). This is also reflected in Perry *et al.*, (2010: 29) where it is noted that “the resistance of Ministers to negative assessments means that those who wish to comment on policy proposals must take a measured, almost diluted approach if they wish to stay in contact with government”.

In response, all of the civil servants interviewed suggested that it was bad news presented as a ‘discourse of opposition’ they objected to, rather than bad news provided constructively:

In academia [sometimes] it's more or less *de rigueur* in the education academic world to be against government policy, almost irrespective of what the government is and what their policy is... Most people [in government] are not that interested in reading things which are basically explaining why everything the government's ever done is the work of the devil, as it were.

(Civil Servant #2)

It was argued by one academic respondent that policy-makers viewed certain types of discourse as 'oppositional' rather than constructive because they originate from, and operate within, an alternative value framework (in other words oppositional discourses sit within a 'traditional' academic value framework of providing critique). Another, though, reaffirmed policy-makers' suggestions that an 'oppositional' stance is not necessarily the same as constructive criticism:

The position I have less respect for... it is the people who say "Well our job is critique and therefore by definition it's not going to be constructive because our job is critique"... I like the work [x] does but he's not trying to construct a policy he's trying to critique policy. It's... hard to get a kind of dialogue because by definition [x] has taken an oppositional position.

(Academic #2)

They [those who actively attempt to influence policy] know... that if they're always being anti [government] then nobody will want to talk to them.

(Academic #13)

In addition *EPPE* interviewees (see Appendix E; p. 240, for a case study of the *EPPE* project) suggested that, in their view, officials were prepared to take on board 'bad news' if presented appropriately. For instance, when examining the quality of nursery provision, *EPPE* interviewees told of how they concluded that quality was poor and, without improvement, would undermine the policy in question; as a result, government acted.

Any openness to constructive critique itself is also likely, however, to be a function of whether the policy in question is central to the current government's announced priorities, and likely to be extensively reported in the press, or regarded as less pivotal (Perry *et al.*, 2010). Taking again the example of free schools; it is likely that, given their central and well reported role in current education policy, evidence that might

question any aspect of them is likely to be fiercely rejected<sup>45</sup>. However other ‘day-to-day’ policies, which are less politically charged, may be more safely questioned. For example, research on better methods of improving classroom behaviour, or on better methods of identifying children in need of special services, might be welcome in government (especially amongst those policy-makers responsible for progress in these areas). In other words, beyond the key manifesto commitments, so long as research is ideologically sound, there may be more possibility for constructive influence.

Nonetheless, academics looking to engage in knowledge adoption strategies to influence both policy-makers and their academic peers may have to find a balance between the type of critique regarded as appropriate by academics and the outputs policy-makers feel are more constructive in nature (Perry *et al.*, 2010). The tension between these types of output is explored in section 6.1 (p. 148). Notwithstanding, a number of respondents managed to achieve this, and did so by pursuing what one described as a ‘schizophrenic’ approach; producing reports appropriate for government when presenting to government and providing a greater level of critique when presenting the same findings to peers or when writing for journals:

You publish quite separately so, for example...[recalling a project undertaken for two government agencies], conventional reports went to those two bodies... subsequently I wrote stuff [on the subject in question for academic journals] which was more critical... that’s a road that many of us go down.  
(Academic #14)

### **5.1.3 – The requirement by policy-makers that the methodology employed by a given study is robust and that it conforms to policy-makers’ epistemological preferences**

In addition to the importance of political compatibility and constructive critique, all respondents also noted that methodological approaches must be considered ‘robust’, and sit within policy-makers’ given epistemological paradigm. Civil service respondents, for instance, illustrated how studies viewed as incompatible with the preferred epistemology of the day were handled in order that findings might be ‘legitimately’ dismissed or ignored. For example, it was said about the *Cambridge*

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<sup>45</sup> Interviewees noted above that evidence relating to ‘Charter Schools’; the US model upon which free schools are based is viewed selectively.

*Primary Review*, an enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England<sup>46</sup> which was subsequently rejected by government, that:

The first months were only about collecting opinion from people motivated to come to meetings. Well, it is interesting and we did read it and note it, but you wouldn't automatically... act on something because people have a strong opinion about it.

(Civil Servant #3)

Thus the findings of the review were, in part, dismissed because of the methodology employed in its early stages. It can be seen, however, that the methodology of the review of primary education commissioned and preferred by the DCSF - the *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* (Rose, 2009) also included opinions captured via its call for evidence from both individuals and associations.<sup>47</sup> That the data collection method was rejected by civil servants for one review, but accepted for another, suggests that politics may also have been in play here in dismissing the *Cambridge Primary Review*; with policy-makers identifying all possible ways to undermine or dismiss the research in question. Perry *et al.*, (2010: 40) affirm this, arguing that the "habit of 'rubbishing' independent reports that cast doubt on some aspects of government policy or performance – as in the Cambridge Primary Review" are, in addition, a function of the increase in power of ideologically motivated political advisors.

All civil servants interviewed also indicated that often the findings from small-scale studies were rejected owing to concerns over their sample size or the nature of their methodology. Simultaneously a preference was given to larger scale studies and meta-analyses:

Where the research is slight [it] wouldn't pass [our] quality control test... there's lots of little research [projects] in the system. We're big fans of systematic reviews.

(Civil Servant #3)

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<sup>46</sup> See: <http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/>

<sup>47</sup> See: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/primarycurriculumreview/>

#### **5.1.4 – Combining the interview data with the review of literature in order to problematise the concept of the agora**

Interview data would thus appear to confirm the notion, put forward as part of the conceptualisation of the policy agora in section 2.7 (p. 37), that ideology and epistemology are key drivers in determining the evidence policy-makers are likely to adopt. In order to explore the implications of these findings further it is necessary to combine them with the literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 13-89).

Mortimore (2000) argues that academic researchers should guard their independence fiercely and insist on their right to generate their own research topics, to evaluate the work of government and to question and dispute political perspectives and policy as appropriate. Foucault argues in *The Order of Discourse*, however, that the 'will to truth' is the major system of exclusion that forges discourse and which "tends to exert a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint on other discourses". Foucault then asks: "what is at stake in the will to truth, in the will to utter this 'true' discourse, if not desire and power?" (cited in Shapiro 1994, p. 113-4). Thus, combining data with a Foucaultian perspective, the agora can be seen to represent a mechanism of exclusion; designed to ensure that research discourse which fails to conform or which challenges the current dominant ideology or epistemology is 'crushed' or 'rubbished' so that its omission from policy is not questioned (Fairclough, 2000; Lister, 2000; Ball 2007, 2008; Perry *et al.*, 2010).

It was acknowledged in the interviews and suggested in the literature review that politics and policy making is fundamentally ideological in nature, with one respondent noting that politicians: "have to operate within some sort of broad set of assumptions about what would be good and bad" (Academic #7). Thus it may appear 'natural' that evidence which is incompatible with the views of the government of the day should be ignored. However, it was also suggested by respondents that dogmatic adherence to a given set of ideological ideas will, by definition, lead to policy-makers failing to hear alternative views which might add value when attempting to solve a particular issue:

Well I think if you look at it across educational research you will find a range of different perspectives on many of the issues that policy-makers are concerned about and I think that educational research can be of great value precisely in providing those different perspectives.

(Academic #7)

Everything is [currently] judged in terms of grading examination papers and that itself is then taken to be an indicator of effectiveness in terms of economic [performance] in the global economy. And yet clearly a lot of research suggests that the sort of learning that is going on... is not the sort of learning that the economy [or the knowledge economy] actually requires.

(Academic #1)

Thus the narrowed and selective view of evidence implied by the existence of the agora is likely to mean that issues at the heart of the policy problem and, importantly, potential solutions to those issues, will not be fully considered. Narrowing the 'epistemological infrastructure' (Atkinson, 2000) in this way is therefore likely to impact upon the efficacy of any proposed policy solution to meet its desired aims and move policy making away from the more effective, efficient and equitable outcomes it is suggested can accrue from providing an evidence base (Oakley, 2000; Oxman *et al.*, 2009). Were policy-makers to consider alternative perspectives, however, this might aid them in preventing instances of policy failure; it was noted during one interview, for example, that Lord Turner, the current Chairman of the Financial Services Authority, has suggested that it was the adherence to one particular and defined economic ideology which helped cause the UK's 'banking crisis' and what is actually required, and what should have been provided, is economic theory pertaining to a range of different economic paradigms.<sup>48</sup> The issues associated with the policy agora will be revisited again in section 8.1 (p. 184).

## **5.2 – The differing purposes of knowledge adoption**

The analysis above confirms that government policy will be informed primarily by evidence residing within the extant policy agora. It can also be surmised, however, that it is only those policy-makers currently in government (i.e. Ministers and civil servants)

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<sup>48</sup> See: <http://www.fsa.gov.uk/pages/Library/Communication/PR/2010/026.shtml>



who adopt from the current agora. Those outside of government; politicians in opposition, who have differing perspectives and policies from the administration of the day, will necessarily consider alternative ideas or policy solutions. This is because the agora represents the government of the day's ideological and epistemological leanings, not those of the opposition. As such, adoption by politicians in opposition will lead to the creation of future policy agoras, formed by new/different ideological and epistemological paradigms. I now analyse in more detail how the process of adoption occurs, both within and outside of the agora, and how this latter type of adoption works to form future agoras. I begin with why and how knowledge is adopted by those operating within the agora of the day.

### **5.2.1 – Why civil servants adopt knowledge from within the current policy agora**

Respondents explained the reasons why civil service policy-makers adopt knowledge exclusively from that which resides within the current agora. One civil service interviewee, for example, described policy making as a Venn diagram, with the Venn seen to comprise: capacity or capability to implement a policy, the political desire or the existence of ideological drivers to do so, and the availability of evidence to provide shape or direction. The purpose of conceiving policy making in this way was to illustrate the idea that the actual use of evidence to develop policies will be dependent upon the exogenous factors in play at any given point in time (i.e. political will and capacity). However, the analogy of the Venn diagram also illustrates that, from the perspective of the civil servants interviewed, the policies they work on or develop originate from the pre-conceived ideas, the commitments and the overall narrative of the Ministers or the political party (or coalition of parties) currently in power. For instance, when detailing the component of the Venn that relates to the desire to implement a given policy, it was described as:

[the] reality of what there is the political will to do, what [Ministers] are seeking to achieve, broader questions of ideology, of what there is a kind of coalition of support to achieve.

(Civil Servant #2)

Since the drivers for policy are ideologically [politically] led, the role of civil service policy-makers is to realise the policy wishes of the elected government of the day. Civil

servants do have agency in this process; this is both noted by Perry *et al.*, (2010) and described by Ball (1994), as 'policy as text'. Overall, however, direction and steer will be provided by Ministers or exogenous policy actors such as the Prime Minister's Office or the Treasury. As a result, the adoption of knowledge by civil servants exists to serve this specific role (i.e. to implement Ministerial policy directives). This is illustrated by the following two quotes:

...of course, Ministers will have ideas that come to them in the bath. They're elected by the public and that's their prerogative [as a result civil servants will try] to get underneath that and understand what it is that the Minister really wants to try and do and then present a range of different options and costs and impacts...

(Civil Servant #5)

[the coalition government] have developed their manifesto, they've actually got a lot of the ideas they want in place... now the big question is how they [the civil servants] are going to implement them over the next five years... so now they are looking for solutions to that.

(Consultancy/think tank #1)

Within the agora politicians also adopt evidence in their capacity as Ministers. Here politicians will primarily be acting upon submissions and advice provided by their civil servants. The evidence adopted by civil servants will, therefore, form part of the policy submissions put forward to Ministers for them to decide or act upon. Academics or other knowledge providers may also approach or may be approached by Ministers directly. Again knowledge will have to be ideologically appropriate for Ministers to adopt or use it. One academic, for example, noted about a former Secretary of State for Education that:

I don't normally write letters to Ministers that's not really my style but I think I was Chairman of some body or other... when [they were] Minister. And I wrote to [them] and just pointed out that some of his policy went against the research. And the next day I had a phone call saying "Would you come and see the Minister [they] want to talk to you etc." And we had an hour's conversation and it was really good... [the Minister] was exceptionally open and willing to take anybody on [but was this] very strong arguer, I mean [they] didn't kind of necessarily take your line at all. (Academic #3)

In this case, because the research was seen as falling outside of the agora, the Minister in question chose not to adopt or further engage with it at that point in time.

A concrete example of the adoption of knowledge from within the agora is provided the *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 longitudinal study (EPPE)*, which was funded by DfES in order to address the policy questions about early childhood education and care (detail on *EPPE* is provided in Appendix E; p. 240). The *EPPE* study represents adoption of this type because it was instigated by the government of the day in order to provide evidence on an issue they had identified whilst in power. In other words, at the time of *EPPE*'s commission, the government had identified the need to transform services available for 0-5 year old children so that they were provided in a more coherent and joined up way (Sylva *et al.*, 2007; Taggart *et al.*, 2008; Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

### **5.2.2 – How adoption occurs outside of the agora and how this leads to the formation of future agoras**

If civil servants and Ministers adopt knowledge from within the extant policy agora then it is politicians, either whilst in opposition or when forming government, who are in the business of creating the agoras of the future. In other words, it is the ideological or political will of those politicians now in power which led to the formation of the current policy agora, and it will be an ideology of one form or another that will lead to the formation of any future policy agoras. As one policy-maker noted:

Whether you are the Labour government of '97 coming in, or whether you are a Conservative government coming in, you've got things you passionately believe in.

(Civil Servant #6)

Alternative agoras can only be formed if politicians adopt knowledge and ideas from outside the parameters of the current agora. This type of adoption can be illustrated by the case of restorative justice (explored in detail in sub-section 2.7.1, p. 39): after being lobbied by the Restorative Justice Council and the Association of Chief Police Officers as to its efficacy, along with exposure to evidence to reinforce this message (Shapland *et al.*, 2007; 2008), a commitment was made in the manifesto of the

Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government to adopt some form of restorative justice as a policy initiative. This adoption of knowledge then helped shaped the agora post election: restorative type approaches to justice now represent a policy commitment and in developing ideas for its delivery civil service policy-makers are considering Shapland *et al.* and other 'what works' evidence that fits within the restorative sphere.

The process of forming a new agora thus begins with the existence of a multitude of ideological paradigms and the political parties who promote or believe in them. As such, politicians and the political staff working for them will require policy ideas or solutions which are compatible with their ideological stance(s), and these solutions will usually be supplied by social actors attempting to lobby or influence the direction of future policy. As one academic researcher argued:

They [politicians] have many people who are coming to them to convince them of one thing or another who will bring them the evidence and they rely very much on the evidence that they're brought.

(Academic #13)

These social actors, collectively, were referred by one respondent as the 'echo chamber':

The echo chamber is referring to, you know, a small group of people that talk to each other. They go to the same parties and they have the same conversations and they are often quite influential and almost hermetically sealed from the rest of the world. And the people in the echo chamber in Washington for example... first off they live in Washington... they are more likely to be members of think tanks than to be members of universities. They may be people who describe themselves as policy people, rather than academics or research people at all.

(Academic #13)

Civil service policy-makers suggested that the influence of the 'echo chamber' was particularly pertinent in instances such as the run up to general elections and, consequently, in the development of election manifestos. This is because pre-election represents the time when politicians are most likely to seek out new thoughts and policy drivers. As one consultancy/think tank respondent noted:

When manifesto development was going on in both [sic] parties, they were coming to us and asking us for ideas.

(Consultancy/think tank #1)

Often, as a result, the policy actors involved in the 'echo chamber' will also then be invited to act as advisors by the incoming government and/or be given privileged access to policy-makers more generally:

So what happens when you have a change of government typically... is that new ministers come in with new friends as it were.

So the people that they've been talking to in opposition and thinking through policy issues [with]... And sometimes that's because they're quite politically sympathetic to start off with, sometimes it's just because they've got interested in their ideas. And this is true of academics and people just working in the system who are professional people that are interesting.

...It's definitely true that a different political perspective means that you are engaged with different people and with different evidence. That's definitely true.

(Civil Servant #2)

### **5.2.3 – How ideology has primacy over epistemology in the formation of agoras**

The interview data also indicates that the formation of a policy agora is neither immediate, nor will its constituent ideological and epistemological paradigms come into existence simultaneously. One policy-maker noted for instance that:

Ideology comes first... you don't go into politics to win elections just to incorporate the latest research...

(Civil Servant #6)

I argue, therefore, that once the first part of the policy agora (the ideological paradigm) is in place, the epistemological paradigm comes to be formed in a number of ways: pre-election as politicians begin to express interest in particular types of evidence which pertain to favoured solutions and/or post-election as civil servants set in place

quality and other epistemological criteria relating to what counts as acceptable knowledge. Alternatively it may also be explicitly specified by politicians; for example, the 'New Labour' administration was, in part, elected on a platform of 'what matters is what works' (Driver and Martell, 2002). As such, it is argued that the epistemological paradigm forming the agora is 'weaker' than the ideological one; political beliefs matters first and foremost, then the nature or quality of the study. This corresponds to Landry *et al.* (2001) who note that adoption of research depends more on the user's context than it does on the attributes of the research itself.

#### **5.2.4 – How adoption occurring outside of the agora is more likely to result in the realisation of evidence-informed policy making**

One potential outcome of politicians adopting knowledge which resides outside of the current policy agora may be regarded as contributing to future evidence-based policy making. That is, if knowledge is adopted by politicians and so used to form the agoras of future governments then, once in power, such knowledge is likely to be acted upon. This was reflected in the following comment from one former Secretary of State:

[in opposition] you're not running a department and I think it's fairly true to say that you come into government with better evidence-based policies than you've got after a year or 18 months [at the end of] the first phases of policies [conceived] in opposition.

(Politician #1)

In addition, any subsequent presentation of analogous or related evidence to civil servants or Ministers, once the relevant agora has been set in place, will be seen as linked to a desired political outcome and will be more likely to be adopted, then acted upon, subject to the final part of the Venn; capability to do so. Relating this back to figure iii, adoption outside of the agora will enhance the social robustness of the idea and/or the knowledge which relates to it, pushing the evidence towards the top left hand corner of the matrix (the most optimal position in figure iii). This will then be its starting position for when researchers wish to have their knowledge adopted within the agora.

### **5.2.5 – How the likelihood of knowledge adoption may alter over time**

In the quote above (Politician #1: “you come into government with better evidence-based policies than you’ve got after a year or 18 months”) it is implied that the ‘ability’ for research to influence policy appears to ‘wear off’ after an initial period. Perry *et al.* (2010: 39) also confirm this notion when they suggest that “the distance between evidence and policy seems to grow, the longer a government is in power”, and that:

It is almost as if, as the grind of government wears on, the regard for evidence or discussion weakens: comment becomes an attack on what you’re doing. The influence [of the knowledge providers] that explored options as politicians prepared for power fades (ibid).

This finding doesn’t negate the validity of figure iii as a model to explain the process of knowledge adoption, but it does suggest that any efforts at knowledge adoption may be more successful when attempted outside of the agora, or at the beginning of a government’s term in office.

### **5.2.6 – The implications of research adoption occurring both within and outside of the agora**

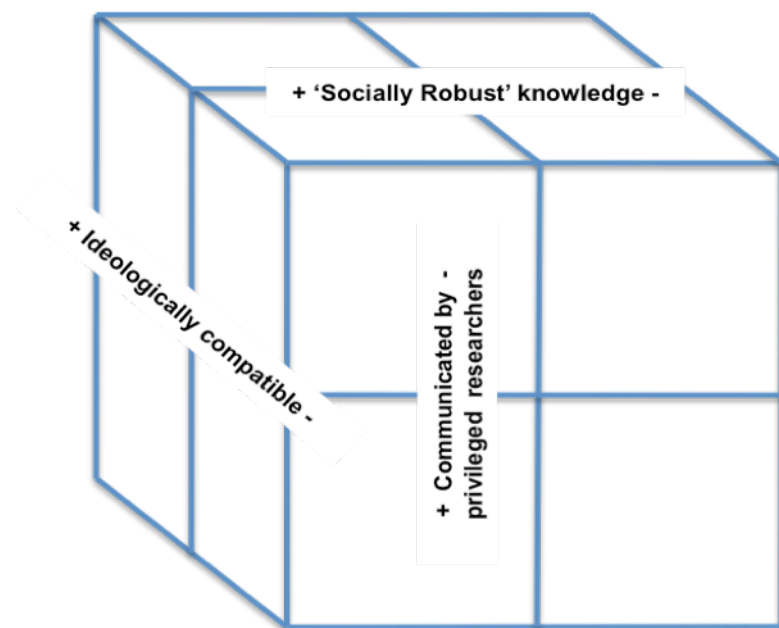
That research use can vary depending on whether it is adopted inside or outside of the policy agora has a number of implications for researchers looking to influence policy direction. For example, in Appendix H (p. 247), figure ix is used to show how the two main models developed for this thesis; figures ii and iii, relate to one another. As part of the conceptualisation of figure ix it is suggested that knowledge adoption, as represented by figure iii, can occur either within or outside of the policy agora and that the process of knowledge adoption will be the same in both situations. Yet it is clear from the analysis above that the process of knowledge adoption will alter significantly if undertaken by politicians in the formation of the agora. This is because it is assumed that for knowledge to be adopted within the agora it must already be compatible with the ideological and epistemological paradigms which come to form it. Outside of the agora, not only will the adoption of knowledge depend on who is disseminating it and the social robustness of their ideas or evidence, but adoption will also depend on with

which ideologies that evidence is compatible. That is, which ‘echo chambers’, knowledge providers might seek to belong to. As one former Minister noted:

Even in opposition you tend to ignore the research that is counter to your political values... so if somebody comes to us and says “all the evidence says selection works” we are still not going to adopt it, its just counter to what we do.  
(Politician #1)

This then results in the version of figure iii represented by figure iv below. Here the added dimension relates to political or ideological compatibility and indicates that academic researchers looking to directly influence future policy agoras will have to ascertain where their ideas will be most welcome, or with whom they might have most resonance, before engaging with the factors associated with knowledge adoption as detailed in figure iii.

**Figure iv: Adoption outside of the agora and ideological compatibility**



**Key:** Figure iv represents a modified version of figure iii (p. 83) and highlights the requirement that, outside of the agora, knowledge providers will also have to consider the ideological resonance of their work and, consequently the most appropriate audience for it. makers.



A further implication resulting from the conceptualisation of figure iv, and of knowledge adoption occurring within and outside of the policy agora, relates the mechanics and operation of the 'echo chamber'. The importance of the 'echo chamber' in facilitating adoption outside of the agora was detailed above. Networks, generally, are regarded within the literature surrounding evidence-informed policy making as an effective way of increasing the demand for research. This is because of the social contact and dialogue they generate, which can serve to promote or reinforce messages concerning key issues or the relevance of evidence in question (Gilchrist, 2000; Kirst, 2000; Watson *et al.*, 2002; Nutley *et al.*, 2007; Cooper and Levin, 2010). Such networks become problematic, however, when they are in actuality closed cliques, which serve to exclude or include social actors according to criterion regarded as desirable or undesirable. This means that they can be difficult or impossible to gain access to. It has already been noted that politics is an ideological game; it thus may be reasonable to conclude that 'echo chambers', by default, will exclude knowledge providers whose messages are not ideologically compatible with their own views. In this sense an echo chamber may be seen to perform an analogous function to that of the policy agora, but in a more nascent form; it will serve to admit those whose knowledge is compatible with the ideology of concern and exclude politicians' exposure to evidence that is not. At the same time, it will serve as a forum to determine which ideas or knowledge may be considered socially robust and will put in place the mechanics to ensure that relevant policy actors, that is, those seeking to influence policy, have the required access to, or are privileged by, politicians on their ascension to government. In this sense the echo-chamber may be regarded as a proto-agora, which develops and forms and ultimately shapes the agora of the day should those in opposition come into power. As such, the issues associated with excluding alternative perspectives that were detailed in sub-section 5.1.4 (p. 124) should also be seen to relate to the existence and operation of echo chambers more generally.

### **5.3 – Policy-makers' requirements that research outputs be 'policy ready'**

Analysis also indicates that policy-makers seek more from the outputs of research studies than simply the presentation of findings; they require advice and recommendations on how findings might be implemented and, in addition, the implications for doing so. The desire for this type of 'policy ready' output is seen to stem from policy-makers regarding themselves as 'consumers' of research, from the proliferation of non-traditional knowledge providers who specialise in producing

findings which are ‘policy ready’ and, consequently, from an implicit ‘marketization’ of the research process. Reaction by academic respondents to this desire for ‘policy ready’ was mixed and the extent to which outputs were made ‘policy ready’ appeared to be a function of how far academics wish or are able to reduce the gap between what their evidence can provide and what is needed to develop or implement a policy. I now explore this notion further and provide a detailed analysis and critique of the notion of ‘policy ready’.

### **5.3.1 – The evidence/policy gap for those outside of the agora**

It was suggested by all policy maker and some academic respondents that a gap exists between what academic research outputs typically tell policy-makers and the type of information policy-makers need to make a decision. Levin (2003) notes that the existence of this gap has led policy-makers to regard academic research as something which is insufficient and that fails to assist them in addressing their policy problems. Interview data suggest, however, that the issues associated with the evidence/policy gap will be a function of the ‘type’ of policy-maker and how they utilise research.

It was argued in sub-section 5.2.2 (p. 128), for example, that knowledge may be adopted outside of the current policy agora by politicians seeking to form future policy agoras. In this situation the gap between what evidence can provide and what is required to form a policy decision is likely to be minimal; what politicians operating outside of the agora are seeking is simply the provision of ideas rather than substantive detail. One think tank interviewee, for instance, noted that:

Pre-election, the parties are [interested in ideas and] less interested in how you are going to implement something  
(Consultancy/think tank #1)

### **5.3.2 – The evidence/policy gap for those operating inside the agora**

The nature and scope of the gap between the evidence and a policy decision is more apparent, however, for those in government. Here the interview data revealed that all civil servants and Ministers interviewed sought detail on ‘application’: that is, advice and recommendations on how to act upon or implement research findings. Responses here included the following:

As a well intentioned person sitting in central government you can see that the research evidence tells you that [a] sort of practice really makes a difference, [but] how do you actually go about making that happen?

(Civil Servant #2)

The way research is presented isn't helpful. Its presented, not interpreted or analysed or rendered fit for policy use... it doesn't say... what the applications are... Researchers often put their hands up and say, "that's not my job. My job is to report the world as it is, to hold a mirror up to nature". Well thanks, but we pay a six-figure sum for that privilege.

(Civil Servant #3)

They are hopeless in my view, a bit strong, but not very good at the solution side.

(Civil Servant #6)

It was felt that one manifestation of such applied advice could be demand driven; policy-makers specifying policy questions such as: "we want to achieve political aim 'x' with capability constraints or other issues; 'y'. How would you, as an academic researcher, advise going about that and what are the issues involved?" One academic suggested, for example, that the development of the National Curriculum had occurred in such a way. One policy-maker responsible for departmental research also noted that this approach had, on occasion, materialised in the development of government Green Papers.

At the same time, all policy-makers and four researcher respondents felt that this type of advice could also be provided by academics actively moving beyond the general principles established by their findings; hypothesising the potential implications of their evidence for policy and/or providing recommendations for how such findings might be generalised or applied across the education system as a whole. This is illustrated by comments from one civil servant who argued that, as a result of their study, researchers should be able to say: "this makes a big difference to the system" (Civil Servant #6). A hypothetical example was provided by one academic respondent, illustrating how such advice might work for 'assessment for learning':

Assessment for learning nailed a concept that there should be very frequent formative assessment in lessons... [this] is of no policy interest whatever. It can't be translated into anything that a policy-maker can make happen in any way whatever. [However] imagine that Dylan Wiliam took his principles and made them into a specific... assessment for learning programme, that had specific training and that was evaluated as a programme that's bound to make this much difference... Then it rises to the level where a policy-maker could say "You know that programme really made a difference and maybe we should... encourage the use of this in some form, using whatever kinds of mechanisms or levers that we have to hand".

(Academic #13)

Similar issues on the same topic were also picked up by one policy-maker:

We know that Assessment for Learning done well makes a big difference and really good quality formative assessment is hugely important. But... if you want to have really good formative assessment in every classroom in the country how do you go about making that more likely or certain? And what is central government's role in that?... So the sort of research which helps you not only understand what it is that it would be desirable to achieve but also then helps you really do the implementation well.

(Civil Servant #2)

One concrete example of this type of applied policy advice may be derived from the way researchers involved with the *EPPE* study presented their findings to policy-makers. A key question for *EPPE* was to understand whether pre-school, primary education or home experiences of learning had an impact on social inequality (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Interviewees involved in the project suggested that exploring and presenting the possible national/system wide impacts of interventions, both financially and on children's outcomes, had helped policy-makers better understand how early years policy might be improved:

They put £3bn extra into Early Years... and this was linked with us being able to show the effects of pre-school... We could show that the effect of pre-school was similar to having a boost of family earned income of £10 - £17k. And clearly pre-school costs less than that... and you couldn't guarantee income [or

benefit income] would have the same effect... [and so this] helped them with the policy choice of expanding pre-school...they did do tax credits and all sorts of other things to support income for the disadvantaged as well, but they thought this was a good way of spending money.

(Academic #12)

Thus *EPPE* provided findings that were firstly adopted, then acted upon. It may also be argued, however, that the way *EPPE* researchers and policy-makers worked in partnership, also played a big part in this process; see Sylva *et al.*, (2007) and Appendix E (p. 240).

### **5.3.3 – The desire by policy-makers for ‘policy ready’ findings**

It is concluded from analysing the interview data that a key requirement of policy-makers is for evidence that is ‘policy ready’; evidence, which through the advice it gives and the recommendations it provides, can be used by policy-makers to implement a given course of action. ‘Policy ready’ outputs may be preferred by policy-makers for a number of reasons, for example: the formulation of evidence and its implications in this way may make it easier for civil servants and others to envisage how such knowledge might be acted upon; the requirement for ‘policy ready’ may also stem from the increased level of ‘micro-management’ by policy-makers in terms of localised practice in schools (Rickinson *et al.*, 2011). Thus policy-makers, who tend not to be educationalists, will require help to devise ‘what works’ practice which corresponds to the policy outcomes they wish to achieve. Policy-makers’ desire for ‘policy ready’ outputs may also be the result of the role organisations, such as think tanks, now play in policy development (this point is explored in sub-sections 5.3.4, below and 5.3.6, p. 143). Demand for ‘policy ready’ will also be reinforced by any lack of capability on the part of policy-makers to digest academic research (Levin, 2004).

### **5.3.4 – The spectrum of ‘policy ready’ outputs**

The extent to which outputs are made ‘policy ready’ will be a function of how far knowledge providers wish or are able to reduce the gap between what the data can provide and what is needed to develop and implement a policy. One researcher explicitly noted, for example, that they did not feel that it was their role to try and attempt to close this space (and a similar position was held by five others):

Well my job is just to explain what research evidence says, and its not my job to make them [policy-makers and politicians] change their minds, I mean I can only put that out into the public debate as best I can, and then its for... other people to challenge politicians.

(Academic #9)

An academic (one of two holding this specific opinion) involved in *EPPE* expressed their desire to go further in transforming their findings into 'policy ready' outputs:

We would say to government... we would tell them that the effect of quality [of staff] is less than the effects say of the home learning environment, its less than the effects of a mother's education, but its more than the effect of free school meals... I would really explain to them the size of the effect... and then we would tell them where the 'elbow' is... [that] teachers make a huge difference to children's learning. We would recommend that if they wanted to improve children's outcomes that its more important to improve the quality of the teacher rather than [other variables]...

How they would go about designing a programme for the Early Years Professional Status... how they work with the FE colleges... how they get into the qualification networks... how these new qualifications are going to be conceived and finally delineated and funded... that's not my job.

So I will specify the effect, I will tell them the kinds of people and qualifications that will make a difference... and what distinguishes the teacher in the classroom... but I don't design the government's system that's going to increase the quality of the staff... other people do that.

(Academic #15)

Some non-academic organisations and knowledge providers attempted to close the gap somewhat more. For example, interviewees noted that the development of 'policy ready' outputs is actively pursued by consultancies such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers or KPMG and, as noted above, by think tanks. Here, interview data illustrate how think tanks themselves felt that it was a fundamental part of their role to make the conceptual leap from research findings to implications/recommendations:

In our work... we always try and push the ["what works"] question one step further. So, if we know "what works" and we've got some evidence on "what works" and what kinds of initiatives work, why aren't we seeing those on a more widespread basis? And that requires system reform, where you have to say "what barriers are there in our system that exist..." I'm very interested in the system reform that you need to enable evidence-based practice.

(Consultancy/Think tank #1)

What think tanks provide may then be regarded as diametrically opposite to 'traditional' academic output (detailed in section 6,1; p. 148) in terms of any level of policy readiness. All researcher respondents intimated that one reason for the antithetical nature of think tank and academic researcher outputs relates to the way think tanks champion causes; something academics may feel uncomfortable in doing. Thus, of particular importance to academic respondents, was the perceived need for them to retain, and be seen to retain, an element of independence:

[Think tanks are in the business of] structuring political thought and decision making... it's a delicate line for researchers because we hold on to this presence of academic independence and not making clear formative statements... we have got to give them something else. We have to say that "we're not in the business of telling you what to do, or even structuring your manifesto, like IPPR might or Demos or one of those, but we are in the business of saying this is what the evidence looks like and these are what we see as the implications". It's a subtle difference but I think it's an important one... and I think we have to be better at teasing out those implications for policy and practice without becoming the opinion formers.

(Academic #5)

The difficulties for researchers faced by policy-makers' desires for 'policy ready' output has been acknowledged by Kirst (2000). Kirst contends that, whilst the task of the researcher is not to write policy itself, it is feasible and possible for them to outline potential policy alternatives. In doing so, Kirst (2000) notes that researchers may also seek to aid policy development by detailing the relative advantages of these alternatives, or highlight potential courses of action, or potential roadblocks to policy-makers' desired destination.

An alternative way of developing 'policy ready' outputs may be through a better use of knowledge brokers. As was noted in sub-section 3.3.2 (p.69), Cohn (2006) suggests that between academic researchers and policy-makers sit a 'third community' whose role or purpose is to use existing research and evidence in order to produce and disseminate analyses that are useful to decision makers. Sin (2008) suggests that within this 'third community' sit knowledge brokers and argues that the principal role of the broker is to encourage research use through the successful translation of findings. Sin (2008) also contends that there are five key roles that may be held by knowledge brokers. Of these, the roles of 'matchmakers', 'brokers' who bring knowledge creators and knowledge users together, 'translators and processors', intermediaries who interpret and adapt information so that it is clear and useful and intermediaries who use 'multiple dissemination routes', that is those who employ different strategies to get new knowledge put into practice are likely to be of most use in helping researchers develop 'policy ready' outputs. For example, one academic interviewee indicated that they view the 'translators and processors' role as key:

I think there's a role for what I'd call in other contexts; knowledge brokers... that is people who are familiar and at ease with the research world, but can also move in the policy world, who can take research findings and see how they might be pertinent for some particular policy areas.

(Academic #5)

The above analysis suggests that what may be considered 'policy ready' relates to the relative position of any given output within a broad spectrum of research outputs; at one end sits 'traditional' academic behaviour (detailed in section 6.1; p. 148 - but typically comprising the undertaking of research and the development of critical theory with outputs presented in academic journals), while the actions of think tanks sit at the 'policy ready' end. The outputs of researchers such as those involved in *EPPE*, meanwhile, sit much closer to that of 'policy ready' than of 'traditional'. The interview data suggest that policy-makers prefer outputs to be as 'policy ready' as possible. This implies that the individual academic should construe their findings so as to be as far along the 'policy ready' end of the output spectrum as they feel comfortable with doing, with the knowledge that this type of output not only encourages adoption, but also use.



### 5.3.5 – How the concept of ‘policy ready’ corresponds to existing theory

The concept of ‘policy ready’ would appear to correspond with suggestions made within the literature review that researchers must generate reasons for policy-makers to adopt knowledge. In particular Nutley *et al.*’s (2007) argument that the narrative through which research is presented must have the power to destabilize policy-makers’ currently held views of the world. That is, making a study’s outputs ‘policy ready’ is likely to increase policy-maker demand because the researcher has attempted to make any implications immediately apparent. Weiss (1991) too suggests that policy-makers are more receptive to ‘ideas’ rather than data, describing ‘ideas’ as “the gist of the story” (1991: 313). Lavis *et al.* (2003) discuss actionable findings basing the term on Weiss’s conceptualisation and likewise, Lindblom and Cohen (1979), Kirst (2000), Court and Young (2003) and Davies (2006) all suggest that policy-makers are keen to receive ‘straightforward’ narratives or stories coupled with advice they can understand. None of these latter authors (Lindblom and Cohen; Kirst; Court and Young or Davies), though, underpin their perspectives with any empirical evidence.

I argue, however, that the notion of ‘policy ready’ differs significantly from these existing suggestions: taking Weiss’s (1991) above conceptualisation and Lavis *et al.*’s (2003) empirical exploration of Weiss’s work, it is argued that the notion of outputs being ‘policy ready’ is fundamentally different to that of academics telling the story which emerges from a study. As a minimum, ‘policy ready’ is about the implications of findings and the recommendations or possible solutions for policies which stem from them. Ultimately, however, ‘policy ready’ outputs may also detail how recommendations might be fulfilled and how the education system may need to be altered to remove and blockages to their implementation. They therefore result from the researcher acting more as a pseudo policy-maker than as a story-teller. Furthermore, with Weiss’s conceptualisation, the “accoutrement” (1991: 313) of the research surrounding the idea is stripped away. As a result, policy-makers have no understanding as to the rigour or quality of the research underpinning such ideas. Conversely, it is suggested that ‘policy ready’ outputs must originate from research, the focus of which sits within the policy agora, and so must be compatible with the existing epistemological paradigm. As a consequence, such research must comply with any quality control mechanisms set in place as part of that paradigm. Thus the notion of

'policy ready' outputs is clearly differentiated from other previous ideas relating to the preferred nature of research outputs.

### **5.3.6 – Combining the interview data with the review of literature in order to problematise the notion of 'policy ready' outputs**

In approximately two thirds of interviews, academic respondents felt that deriving 'policy ready' output from research findings will not always be appropriate. In addition that, in some cases, the function of research should be to inform the overall policy environment, rather than specific policies:

Some research can lead to sensible recommendations... other research sometimes has more difficult and complicated and complex messages which I think can inform policy thinking... or putting something into the mindset within that policy frame... and I think that is lost by many officials... that they're simply looking for recommendations.

(Academic #1)

The notion that research may not necessarily be susceptible to being made 'policy ready' is affirmed by Rickinson *et al.*, (2011) who also argue that policy-makers are not always aware of how different types of research may be used. The notion of firm, concrete, 'policy ready' solutions is also likely to be regarded as problematic from a post structural perspective (Hammersley, 1995; Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Mirchandani, 2005. See Appendix A; p. 223, for more detail).

I argue that the desire for 'policy ready' outputs stems from policy-makers regarding themselves as consumers of research, whether that research is government commissioned or not, as opposed to potential partners or stakeholders in the research process. The notion of policy-makers as consumers is derived from the poststructuralist perspective (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003). Trowler (2003: 202) notes, for instance, that poststructuralism posits:

many contrasting sources of information are available to individuals and they are able to pick and choose from them... Consumption, in this very wide sense, is an important feature of postmodernity.

As consumers, policy-makers can regard themselves free to select or omit evidence as with any other consumer product: that is, based on its benefits and features, with policy readiness considered one such feature.

At the same time, the process of consumption has been made easier by the increase in knowledge suppliers looking to influence policy (Davies *et al.*, 2000: 1). For instance, the move towards 'Mode 2' knowledge was noted in the literature review (Gibbons, 1999). A key characteristic of 'Mode 2' knowledge is that the validity of any knowledge produced (its 'social robustness') will, to a degree, be determined by its users. Ball and Exley (2010) argue, however, that this characteristic of 'Mode 2' has materialised via shifts in the research discourses deemed appropriate for consumption by policy-makers, with value being primarily placed on the simple, easy to understand, messages generated by a growing plethora of think tanks. Commission on the Social Sciences (2003) confirms this, maintaining that think tanks are now the investigative organisations of choice for policy-makers. Ball and Exley's claim was reflected in the following quote from one civil servant respondent:

I do subscribe to [the view that policy-makers are customers of research] but... I think that the research community will have its own considerations in terms of what the final products will look like... [as such] I think there is a feeling that [think tanks and consultancies] are probably going to be easier to work with in terms of giving you something quite specific, in a short period of time and that will provide propositions for implementation and there probably is less inclination... [to turn to academics] for that kind of product.  
(Civil Servant #1)

Academic respondents expressed similar opinions on the role of think tanks in policy making, summarised by the following quote:

The relationship of research evidence has been increasing mediated or constructed by think tanks in relation to [political] parties... '[the emergence of think tanks has led to the development of] policy ideas which both had a kind of public appeal – something that could be released, given to news release, press release, but also something that could be translated into practice...  
(Academic #1)

In acting or regarding themselves as consumers and in patronising the multitude of knowledge providers which now exist, I contend that policy-makers have implicitly begun to 'marketize' the research process, through their discourse and behaviour. Perry *et al.*, (2010) note the importance of marketization as the preferred mode of government administration and marketization is described by Fairclough as a process which leads to "the reconstruction on a market basis of domains which were once relatively insulated from markets" (1995:19). Marketization can occur economically, but in this instance, marketization is the result of a change in "cultural values or identities" (ibid) and construed as the "colonization of public orders of discourse by the discursive practices of the private sphere" (ibid). I now explain the process and manifestation of marketization in more detail.

It was argued in section 2.4 (p. 22) that discursive control and imbalances in power relations between researchers and policy-makers may influence, not only how academic researchers talk and think about their work, but also how they operate (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Strathern, 2000). Trowler (2003) notes that the process of 'marketization' involves the distillation and appropriation of discursive repertoires from business or marketing and from the language of consultancies or think tanks. I argue, therefore, that the process of 'marketization', combined with discursive control on the part of policy-makers, will, firstly, lead to such discourses being employed by policy-makers; subsequently they will also begin to permeate the language used academic researchers and, as a consequence, will ultimately serve to determine or structure how academic researchers might conceive their outputs and so how they operate.

For policy-maker respondents this initial permeation could be easily observed where, for instance, the following words or phrases were all used when making reference to research: 'solutions', 'ideas', 'applications', 'implementation', 'impact', 'rendered fit for policy use' etc. I also contend that the process of marketization could be observed in the discourses employed by those academic respondents who actively attempt to influence policy or produce 'policy ready' output. Here, as the following example shows, similar terms were also frequently used:

If you don't have that work in the middle to translate basic research into [policy applications] then it's very unlikely that research is going to influence anything...

(Academic #13)

Others, not making this type of attempt, continued to employ more traditional academic phrases when describing what their research output might reveal about the empirical world. For example: 'perspectives', 'critique', 'inform', 'complexity' etc.

In addition, an analysis of what was not said by policy-makers during the interviews in relation to 'policy ready' also proved poignant: it was found that policy-makers made no suggestion that 'policy ready' outputs should be born out of acts of partnership or that they (policy-makers) had a role in improving research outputs. These omissions came despite the practical experience of policy that is required in order to produce 'policy ready' output. As one academic respondent noted:

Policy making, like any other form of practice, necessarily relies on what you might call 'practical wisdom'. It depends on people actually thinking about what is involved... [and the] process of interpretation and judgement.

(Academic #7)

Rickinson et al., (2011) also observe the obligations on policy-maker to explicitly specify their requirements from research so that they might be met by researchers.

Thus such changes to, or omissions from, the discursive lexicon employed by policy-makers will, ultimately, result in [some] academic researchers changing their behaviour to meet that which is required; in other words, to act alone/without policy-maker assistance in the production of 'policy ready' output. This then supersedes the ability for academics more generally to be able to engage with policy-makers in preferred, alternative ways: for example, by setting out the epistemological complexities and frailties of the knowledge in question (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Strathern, 2000; Mirchandani, 2005) rather than providing outputs shaped exclusively through the lenses of 'policy ready' and/or 'what works'. Both Fairclough (2000) and Trowler (2003) note that an academic response to this 'push' isn't inevitable and this is confirmed by the interview responses above. But, at the same time, the 'move away from traditional expertise' postulated by Ball (2008), Exley (2008) and Ball and Exley (2010) and borne out in the interview responses, implies that should academics not wish to succumb to the forces of marketization, the value of their contribution may be systematically ignored or down-graded and alternative knowledge providers such as 'policy ready' academics, think tanks or consultancies privileged instead.

Counter arguments to these latter points contend that by changing behaviour, the discourse of marketization may be seen to be improving the output of researchers/universities by relating them to customer/public need (Shore and Wright, 1999). Apple (2007), for instance contends that marketization is often instigated to reduce the possibility that outputs are internally driven and instead relates them to customer need. In other words, outputs become spurred by what is required by society rather than the whims or desires of individuals (outputs become more efficient uses of resource). As a result, the behaviours and actions of social actors become more efficient by being linked to these outputs. As such, I suggest that the notion of 'policy ready' in itself (i.e. that researchers seeking to influence policy should attempt to contextualise their findings and provide recommendations on how they might be used) should not be viewed as problematic or inherently bad: if researchers think their work is of value, then they should maximise the opportunity for others to realise and capitalise on this value. 'Policy ready' becomes contentious, however, when policy-makers take the consumerist perspective; solely viewing the role of research as providing policy solutions rather than being able to contribute to the development of policy in other ways (such as by providing wider enlightenment, critique or diverse perspectives). Policy-makers should thus be open to the wider and valuable contribution research can make to policy development.

In addition, one of the most successful examples of research impacting on policy; the *EPPE* study, produced its 'policy ready' outputs as a result of the mechanisms in place to ensure that researchers and policy-makers were able to work in partnership together. 'Policy ready' may not thus naturally develop in isolation from policy-makers and, as such, a partnership approach may better suit its formation (Sylva *et al.*, 2007; Taggart *et al.*, 2008). Policy-makers therefore need to acknowledge the role they must play in helping the research output reach the point of 'policy readiness'. In other words, the need to engage with researchers and their work and, as partners, to help tease out an understanding of what implications there are.

## **6 – Issues faced and strategies employed in pursuit of knowledge adoption**

Chapter 5 (p. 117) detailed policy-makers' requirements of research and the implications of those requirements for the knowledge adoption process. In chapter 6, I now consider two academic-centric factors: the issues that are faced by academic researchers who attempt to engage in the twin competing demands of producing academic outputs whilst seeking to influence policy development, and; the knowledge adoption strategies employed by those who do attempt to influence policy, and how these compare to the knowledge adoption strategies employed by other knowledge suppliers, such as think tanks.

### **6.1 – The competing demands on researchers who seek to produce academic outputs and influence policy**

It was noted in sub-section 5.3.6 (p. 143), that there are a number of reasons why academics may choose not to develop their research findings into 'policy ready' outputs: some respondents discussed the need to retain a degree of distance and independence from the policy making process, others argued that research wasn't always amenable to being manipulated in this way (also see Rickinson *et al.*, 2011). It was also suggested by interviewees that researchers should be involved in critical theorizing rather than just problem solving: undertaking research in order to provide critique 'of' policy, as much as they might undertake research 'for' policy (also see Troyna, 1994; Moore, 1996; Ozga, 2000). In addition, however, it was observed by respondents that there are few incentives in place for them to develop 'policy ready' findings compared to those which encourage the development and distribution of 'traditional' academic outputs. Consequently, where researcher respondents attempted not only to enhance and develop their academic career, but also to influence policy, a tension arose which hindered their ability to successfully pursue both courses of action. I now provide an analysis of these incentives and the 'policy ready'/traditional tension.

### **6.1.1 – The reward structures traditionally associated with academia**

All researcher respondents and some policy makers observed that academic reward structures encouraged what is regarded as ‘traditional’ academic behaviour: that is, the production of research geared towards the development and promotion of theory and the communication of findings via journals or at conferences. Correspondingly, it was suggested that there was little requirement for academics to assess or demonstrate the impact of their research on policy or practice:

Educational researchers usually get rewarded for having more journal articles in high level journals.

(Academic #4)

Until recently applied research and impact didn't feature too high on the RAE. It is very prominent now in the proposals for the REF... but if you know that the brownie points are going to be for scholarly work that may not have much direct or obvious policy impact, well, that's what you're going to concentrate on.

(Academic #10)

The inevitable consequence of such reward structures, therefore, has been to limit perceptions of the value that might be derived from engaging with policy-makers and so also limit attempts to apply research in a way that might influence policy:

My work is about teacher and student perspectives and the processes of social interaction... it has potential policy implications... but that is not something which I ever emphasise. I never put in much effort to be honest in terms of trying to make knowledge available to policy-makers.

(Academic #7)

### **6.1.2 – The imperative to influence policy**

At the same time, however, approximately one third of the academic respondents specifically argued that tax payers, research funders and other stakeholders had a



'moral right' to demand that research is used to influence, alter and change the social world:<sup>49</sup>

...realistically the tax payer ought to be seeing an impact of their research dollars on the research that gets done... or the tax payers ought not to be funding it.

(Academic #4)

Such respondents thus sought to ensure that their findings could be applied by policy-makers in the development of policy. One interviewee, for example, outlined specific efforts to engage with politicians and civil servants in order that their evidence might be adopted by them. They went on to suggest that some US researchers are located near Congress and have a presence with those making Federal policy and noted that:

In the UK we've tried to do the same to try to affect the Department for Education and Parliament and other policy-makers relating to education.

(Academic #13)

It is also useful at this stage to distinguish between the epistemic roles of primary research and of systematic reviews of available evidence. The role of the former is original investigation, the latter to appraise the weight of existing evidence in order to inform decision making, invariably linking the researchers/institutions who undertake them to policy and policy makers. The EPPI-Centre at the University of London's Institute of Education, for instance, falls into the latter camp; undertaking the majority of its systematic reviews to meet the needs of government. Those working for EPPI felt that that in answering the questions asked by government, they ensured that EPPI provided material of both relevance and use:

There's no point in us kind of sitting round saying "Oh what would be an interesting question?" we need to ask a question which is useful and relevant. Systematic reviews is applied research really.

(Academic #6)

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<sup>49</sup> Sanderson (2010) in fact suggests that, in relation to knowledge adoption, academics may be divided into three camps: 'evangelists', 'agnostics' and 'sceptics' rather than the two I have postulated above.

A number of respondents believed, therefore, that there exists an imperative to attempt to influence policy but, simultaneously, found themselves constrained or influenced by existing incentives to behave in traditionally academic ways or to produce traditional academic outputs. The submission guidance for a number of journals, for example, explicitly discourages the reporting of anything that cannot be substantiated; in the American Educational Research Journal's *Guidelines for Reviewers*, for instance, it is specified that reviewers must look at how the data were interpreted in order for the conclusions to have been reached.<sup>50</sup> Similarly in *Standards for Reporting on Research in AERA Publications*, it is stated that authors should make clear how their analysis procedures led to the outcomes reported.<sup>51</sup> such criteria incentivising researchers to state only what their data explicitly enables them to. This 'tension' between responding to traditional incentives and seeking to influence policy is exaggerated further when examining policy-makers' requirements for 'policy ready' outputs (see section 5.3; p. 134, and Kirst, 2000), which specifically require researchers to move beyond the data. Any action directed in this way thus comes with the opportunity cost of not producing an output that may enhance their academic career or standing.

At the same time, it was noted in sub-section 3.3.1 (p. 67) that the outputs of think tanks, consultancies and other, non-academic, knowledge providers are not constrained in this type of way. Think tanks, for instance, do not have to compete for Economic and Social Research Council funding, or participate in the Research Assessment Exercise and so are free to write directly for the policy user, free from the scrutiny routinely encountered by academics (Mortimore, 2000; Haas, 2007). Since they are not faced by requirements to provide 'traditional' outputs, these non-traditional knowledge providers can concentrate exclusively on outputs which are 'policy ready'. This ability for think tanks (and others) to write directly for the policy user, without any formal processes of quality control, would appear to put academic researchers at a disadvantage in terms of influencing policy (particularly noting policy-makers' desire to 'marketize' the types of output they might adopt). But it is argued that the tension faced by academics is not a polemic: 'traditional' academic outputs, such as articles in scholarly journals, are also likely to help researchers illustrate how their work sits within any given epistemological paradigm by adding weight to claims of quality or the appropriateness of the methodology employed. For instance, for the findings of a

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<sup>50</sup> See: [http://www.aera.net/publications/Default.aspx?menu\\_id=34&id=10722](http://www.aera.net/publications/Default.aspx?menu_id=34&id=10722)

<sup>51</sup> See: [http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational\\_Researcher/3506/12ERv35n6\\_Standard4Report%20.pdf](http://www.aera.net/uploadedFiles/Publications/Journals/Educational_Researcher/3506/12ERv35n6_Standard4Report%20.pdf)

research study to have been published in an academic journal, potential articles will have been subject to peer review, and the quality, rigour and methodology of their studies assessed.<sup>52</sup> As such, one interviewee, a former government minister, noted that:

When I was a Minister I would have said “well its been published so it must be alright”.

(Politician #1)

Whilst one civil service policy-maker also suggested that, whilst not an indication of providing all the qualities required by policy-makers:

Publication in journals suggest that the author has done something right; that they have produced a high quality study, that it’s well respected, that sort of thing.

(Civil Servant #4)

An accumulation of traditional academic outputs will also improve academic standing, which may also add credence in terms of the reputation of the researcher concerned.

In addition, as the *EPPE* study has shown (see Appendix E; p. 240), outputs can be differentiated according to audience and thus tailored appropriately. Some civil servant respondents, for example, appreciated academic researchers’ concerns with the requirements and demands of the RAE on their outputs, but noted that:

Where I think [academics] could do more to work with policy-makers is in producing papers off the back of [their academic] research reports that are more targeted to a particular policy discussion or an implementation strand discussion.

(Civil Servant #1)

In other words, policy-makers suggested that academics might write two reports; one with a view to publication and another to aid the development of policy. However, there is little kudos from academic peers for doing so, and such efforts come with both the theoretical (opportunity) cost incurred by spending time on policy-centric outputs, rather

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<sup>52</sup> For example, see: [http://www.iejcomparative.org/submission\\_criteria.php](http://www.iejcomparative.org/submission_criteria.php)

than engaging in further ‘traditional’ behaviour and the actual resource implications that come from producing multiple outputs.<sup>53</sup>

### **6.1.3 – How might the tension between traditional reward structures and the imperative to influence policy be resolved?**

The Research Excellence Framework (REF), the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions, will be completed in 2014. As part of REF, the wider impact of research will now be assessed more systematically. Here, HEFCE note that “significant additional recognition will be given where high quality research has contributed to the economy, society, public policy, culture, the environment, international development or quality of life”.<sup>54</sup> HEFCE (2010) also suggest that up to 25 per cent of the REF assessment will, for the 2014 exercise, be dependent upon measures of impact. It will be interesting to examine whether, as a result of this change in incentive structures, academics (or the Universities within which they are situated) are encouraged to consider the outcomes that might be achieved with their work and, correspondingly, whether the current ‘traditional’ vs. ‘policy ready’ tension is reduced.

As noted above, ‘policy ready’ should also be considered in the light of partnership approaches to working rather than viewed through the lens of the ‘deficit’ model of research. In section 8.4 (p. 196), I consider the role that policy-makers might play in facilitating the ‘policy ready’ process, and the incentives or support that might be created for, or supplied to, academics as part of this.

## **6.2 – The knowledge adoption strategies employed by academics**

This section examines the knowledge adoption strategies employed by academics, when attempting to negotiate the *internal* and *external* factors set out in figure iii. Whilst sections 5.3 (p. 134) and 6.1 (p. 148) considered the issues associated with academic researchers seeking to ‘apply’ their research; either to aid the development of policy or as part of more ‘traditional’ academic endeavours, the following findings are concerned

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<sup>53</sup> The development of specific additional reports for policy-makers is also reflected in BERA's *Good practice in educational research writing*. See: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/files/guidelines/goodpr1.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> See: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/impact/>

with how evidence is 'promoted' to policy-makers. As with knowledge adoption more generally the promotion of research should be viewed as being influenced by inequalities in power relations and discursive control on the part of policy-makers. In this case, such inequalities materialise through the requirement that researchers seeking to influence policy must communicate or promote their outputs via modes or media which best suit policy-makers' needs as potential research customers. In other words, through the suggestion that researchers must cater their efforts to meet the needs of policy-makers, rather than expect policy-makers to embrace all research in the myriad of ways and formats in which it is presented to them.

My analysis in this section covers the seven main promotion strategies that were derived from the interview data: the timeliness of outputs; coding, signalling, marketing and branding; modes of communication; discursive style; level of detail; mobilising social opinion and access to policy-makers. I also examine the knowledge adoption strategies employed by think tanks in order to determine whether anything may be learned from these, or whether they might be emulated by academics. I begin this section by examining notions of 'timeliness'.

### **6.2.1 – Ensuring that research outputs are timely in order to enhance their relevance**

Six of the academic respondents discussed the need for research outputs to be appropriately timed. For instance, in discussing those social actors who understand how to ensure their work is of value, one academic researcher noted that they:

Take into account that which really is going to be useful to the policy-maker. And if you're really going to master it you'll have a sense of timing of what's the issue that the policy-maker really needs to hear about and a sense about what they're ready to hear. You know at a point when a policy-maker can publicly come out in favour of a given proposition they may be very interested in hearing... ways to make that kind of thing work, but utterly uninterested in evidence counter to the thing that they've already announced. So there's a point in time when they're kicking things around that they may be very interested in the full range of evidence. But when that moment is gone it's gone. (Academic #13)

One concrete example emerged from the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), which made a priority of ensuring that the programme's research outputs were not only relevant to the issues currently faced by policy-makers, but also appropriately timed so that they could provide influence at the right moment. A senior manager of the programme commented:

We pitch the commentaries that have contemporary issues so we're of concern... [and we] take them to market more quickly than [traditional] research projects.

(Academic #11)

Another academic respondent told of how they engineered one aspect of their work so that it was timed to coincide with the political cycle:

[At the time of the general election] we did election briefings; summary accounts of main policy issues... written in an accessible way... to feed into the debate around that time.

(Academic #9)

It was also suggested that for outputs to be timely, knowledge providers must be able to identify opportunities as they arise. One former Minister argued, however, that this may not always be a simple process:

[Academics being able to target their work schedule to ensure it is relevant and timely is] easier said than done because, as we've found out, governments can change with different priorities and Ministers change, you know, far more often... but I think scientists and academics are generally much better at this than they used to be, and I think the research councils are seized by this more.

(Politician #2)

It was also suggested by academic respondents that the identification of appropriate windows of opportunity, in which researchers could or should act, depended on effective horizon scanning. Such future gazing type activities were seen to require the monitoring of political, media and pedagogical developments and the ability to spot occasions for action. But they were also regarded as requiring the capability to respond quickly.

The ‘timeliness’ of outputs as a knowledge adoption strategy relates to the *internal* factor; ‘proactivity, contextualization and tailoring’ (Kirst, 2000; Wolter *et al.*, 2002; Lavis *et al.*, 2003; Davies, 2007; Brown, 2009; Rickinson *et al.*, 2011 and detailed in sub-section 3.2.4; p. 64). That is, (a number of) respondents engaged in proactive behaviour to ensure that policy-makers were presented with relevant messages at optimally appropriate points in the policy making process, rather than wait to be asked by policy-makers for any knowledge that they might have. Such behaviours are also geared towards creating a ‘demand’ for the evidence in question (a key *external* factor); that is, providing researcher generated reasons for policy-makers to take on board more information.

As a strategy, and as a concept, ‘timeliness’ should also be addressed critically. For example, it was noted in the literature review that, from a Foucaultian perspective, ‘timeliness’ may be seen to compel academic researchers who wish to help solve problems or issues to structure the timing and nature of their work to the agenda of government. This then precludes such researchers from developing open relationships with policy-makers and from delivering messages that provide challenge and help steer policy in new directions (Troyna, 1994; Ball, 1997; Mortimore, 2000). In Brown, (2009) however, I propose that academic researchers aim to be ‘proactive criticsers’: proactively scheduling work so that government policy can be critically analysed in a timely, accessible and rigorous way. Any resulting policy developments thus subsequently occur through such knowledge being traded within the agora, or used in a way that leads to shifts in the paradigms that form the agora. The notion that academic researchers should attempt to be ‘proactive criticsers’ was also reiterated by a number of others authors (Pestieau, 2003; Taylor, 2005; Cohn, 2006; Davies, 2007; Council for Science and Technology, 2008: sub-section 3.2.4; p. 64). It is thus suggested that, if employed in such a way, a strategy of ‘timeliness’ may enable researchers to engage with government, but do so without losing academic independence.

### **6.2.2 – The use of coding, signalling, marketing and branding by academic researchers**

In my analysis of the McKinsey report (Appendix M; p. 261), it is argued that the signalling and coding utilised by Barber and Mourshed present their work in such a way that meaningful points are communicated in an accessible format to policy-makers.

From the interviews it was clear that two or three others employ comparable techniques. For example, one academic noted a forthcoming publication designed to appeal to policy-makers:

It will be rather quite cleanly written, jargon free, use of photographs, lots of use of white space etc. to try and engage politicians and, indeed, interested public on what is known [on the topic in question] with links to “if you want to find out more, here’s where to go” kind of thing.

(Academic #9)

In terms of the publications produced as part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP) it was stated that:

We employed a professional corporate design specialist to design TLRP, to come up with the logos and the typeface and some of the basics, so we have identity guidelines, as it’s called in the trade, which go on all the TLRP outputs. So that blue cover colour, a sort of take on UN blue for independent research-y stuff. The typeface is Helvetica Light which is also supposed to be associated with independence... There are various parts of the design which are exactly the same aspects of design in any corporation which is to convey the quality of its products.

(Academic #11)

Nutley *et al.* (2007: 71) argue that “presentation is key: research must be attractive... and visually appealing”. I maintain, however, that coding and signalling techniques, whether employed by Barber and Mourshed (2007) or by the TLRP, move beyond this; they serve as marketing tools which aim to promote a brand image, or a particular ‘take-out’ message about the research output(s) in question. As such, as interviewees suggested was the case with the McKinsey report, effective coding and signalling may also negotiate the *external* knowledge adoption factor; ‘perceived credibility of the source’ (Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Campbell *et al.*, 2007). For instance, by achieving an association with values such as ‘independence’. The ability to present work in a way that accounts for or incorporates specific brand messages that might be achieved via appropriate use of coding and signalling will, however, require specific capacity and skill on the part of the academic. Issues associated with capacity are analysed in section 7.3 (p. 180).



### 6.2.3 – Perceptions regarding the most effective modes of communication

It was argued in section 3.2.3 (p. 62) that an appropriate choice of method or mode of dissemination is vital in grabbing the attention of potential users (Mortimore, 2000). Most academic respondents used journal articles as their main mode of communication. At the same time the majority of academic respondents were of the view that policy-makers, especially politicians, failed to engage with any type of formal research literature. The interview data confirmed, this indicating that most policy-makers found such material difficult to digest. Comments here included the following:

Most academic research published in leading journals is published for other academics because nobody else reads those journals... So the stuff is written for an academic audience, it's not written really by and large for a general audience and that can be an issue.

(Civil Servant #2)

I think the problem with researchers is that they don't know how to communicate... often [through] some sort of obtuse academic journals... it is poorly presented.

(Civil Servant #6)

These responses also correspond with the literature reviewed in section 3.2 (p. 57), which found that academics' extensive use of academic journals often led to both policy-makers and practitioners regarding research outputs as inaccessible (Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Wolter *et al.*, 2002). The primacy afforded to communication in journals may, in part, be the result of a historic lack of funding for alternative forms of dissemination or communication (Sebba, 2007), but it will also be the result of the incentives in place for academics to develop such research outputs as detailed in section 6.1 (p. 148).

Face-to-face communication was generally preferred by policy-makers as an alternative to the use of journals and a regular research seminar, held by one Department for Education, was regarded as particularly useful:

At the minute we hold a Ministerial seminar series. And we've brought in external academics who've been working on a particular topic of interest, to give a seminar of their work.

(Civil Servant #5)

Academics also reflected on the importance of face-to-face communication:

[With face-to-face communication] you have much greater opportunity to explain, to point out the nuances, to point out the subtleties of evidence to me is so important.

(Academic #5)

It's quite important to organise face-to-face meetings of different kinds, either seminars or working groups or informal meetings, lunches; networking of all kinds.

(Academic #10)

That the interview data suggested face-to-face was also one of the most common modes of communication employed by academics (second only to journals) conflicts, however, with the findings of Paisley (1993) Lavis *et al.* (2003) and Levin (2004). These authors argue that researchers are currently broadening their dissemination efforts via more extensive use of websites and are only concentrating to a lesser extent on more active strategies such as researcher/practitioner workshops (although it should be noted that these references are now relatively dated and based on studies undertaken in Canada).

Other modes of communication had been tried and potential ideas suggested by policy-makers. One, for instance, told of their experiences in the USA, where research reports could be downloaded into 'iPod' type formats, this meant that audiences could access a presentation and commentary on the findings whilst away from the office. Generally, however, alternative forms of communication had not been incorporated into academics' overall approach to dissemination:

I suppose the other thing that we haven't exploited at all yet... is things like Facebook, Twitter and all the new models – well, new to me – models of communication that offer lots of possibilities about how you present information.

(Academic #10)

And, overall, discussion by academic researchers on alternative communication types was limited. Given policy-makers' reactions to the extensive use by academic researchers of formal research literature, alternative forms of mass communication will

also be required if academics wish to influence policy-makers, as well as their peers. It is suggested, therefore, that academics looking to influence policy-makers on a larger scale (and at a lower cost) than can be achieved through face-to-face communication may wish to consider both the press and new media alternatives (the former is covered in sub-section 6.2.5, p. 164).

#### **6.2.4 – The choice of discursive style and ensuring that the level of detail provided is ‘appropriate’**

For any mode of communication to be successful, an appropriate discursive style is also required. For instance, one policy-maker, in discussing the clearing of research briefs produced by academics, noted:

The last lot, I had to reject three because the summaries were just unintelligible, let alone the main report. So even words like “exogenous”... its not necessarily easy for a non-technical audience to engage with. So writing in really simple [plain English] terms is important.

(Civil Servant #5)

The importance of writing in a way appropriate to the audience was also often both recognised and attended to by academic respondents:

Well I think the important thing is to recognise that there is different sorts of writing for different audiences... if you are actually trying to address a policy making audience then you have got to do something probably quite different. You have got to accept that the first part of what you present is going to have to be quite short, written in non academic language and is going to have to relate to a current policy issue in some way. You are going to have to have material that you can follow up with if people are interested but even that is going to have to be written in a way that enables people to understand the research evidence when they don't have that much background.

(Academic #7)

Another suggested that when communicating to policy-makers, they too tried to reduce the level of ‘jargon’ employed:

So on the [the respondent's website] we have summaries that are written in plain English so that non-researchers can understand them.

(Academic #4)

Finally, one academic respondent noted that, in their organisation, specific individuals were employed to transform academic discourse into a language which policy-makers could quickly and easily digest:

We write articles and the... publications person... tries to make that in a more accessible language for policy-makers, politicians and the general public.

(Academic #9)

This function, akin to the 'translators and processors' role performed by knowledge brokers (Sin, 2008), was not mentioned by other respondents. It thus appears to be unique as a service, specifically offered by this respondent's institution/university rather than something provided universally by universities (an international review by Sá *et al.*, 2010, also notes that only a small number of universities provide this type of assistance).

Likewise, all respondents acknowledged that policy-makers were unlikely to digest significant amounts of detailed information in relation to a specific report or output. In describing the level of detail that should be provided to policy-makers, a number of researcher respondents touched upon the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation's 1:3:25 model:<sup>55</sup>

We always produce a 1:3:25... if you turned in a 130 page report, apart from a few [government] researchers, nobody would actually read it. Also... we do, as in the Cochrane model, now we give them the two sentence, plain English summary.

(Academic #5)

The EPPI-Centre has also adopted a similar format to that of the 1:3:25, but have adjusted it to that of 1:20:100. Here it was explained that EPPI had experimented with 1:3:25 but found that it irritated policy-makers to read a three page summary that only

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<sup>55</sup> The 1:3:25 format refers to: a page of key takeout messages derived from the report, a three page executive summary, and a complete report of no more than 25 pages in length.

revealed slightly more than the first initial summary page. Instead, the 1:20:100 approach provides an initial summary, a 20 page 'report' and a hundred page technical report with appendices providing further detail including methodology, data analysis etc. The technical document is rarely provided to policy-makers unless requested, but it was argued that:

You need to have the detail there if they need it, you can't just have that as your produce, you've got to have the follow through if necessary.  
(Academic #6)

Policy-makers (all respondents) also acknowledged that smaller summaries are preferred. One policy-maker, in discussing a recent report, noted:

And the research that came back was just perfectly what you wanted. It had about five or six things to recommend. It was clear to me what had to be done.  
(Civil Servant #3)

While another argued that researchers need to produce:

A four page, really simply-written summary that teases out the key points without getting into technical issues around the methodology or even the way [the methodology is] described.  
(Civil Servant #5)

In addition, it was suggested that other presentational facets helped policy-makers engage and digest the findings, including case studies and 'inset' or 'call out' boxes.

Both the level of detail and the discursive style employed relate to the *internal* factor described as the 'accessibility' of the message (Lavis *et al.*, 2003; Davies, 2006; Brown, 2009). That is, these strategies address the need for research findings to be explained in language which is easy to digest and set out in a way that ensures attention is not distracted, or attention spans exceeded (Backer, 1991). In doing so, detail should be concentrated on the things that matter to policy-makers (such as recommendations) rather than the things that matter less within the policy context (for example, extensive detail on methodology, presented at the beginning of a report).

Whilst simple messages, both discursively and in terms of the level of detail provided,

were preferred by policy-makers, two academic respondents specifically highlighted potential issues associated with this approach:

If you want to understand something, you've got to understand that it will be complex.

(Academic #14)

If you lose the nuances, perhaps you lose the effectiveness. By reducing things to very simple messages, you can actually cut out what is important.

(Academic #1)

There is a danger, therefore, that policies informed by 'bullet point discourses' may well end up being very superficial in nature: that is, not capturing the subtleties and nuances that the original study may have uncovered or by portraying the world as simpler than it actually is (MacLure, 2005). As a result, policy may not fully meet the benefits assumed to accrue from being comprehensively informed by evidence, and effectiveness, efficacy or equity potentially suffering as a result.

The dangers of simplicity were also noted within the literature review. Giroux (1992), for instance, argues that the notion of simplicity is determined and regulated by the status quo; that is, by policy-makers rather than researchers. Sharland and Taylor (2006) also argue that researchers may compromise their message by trying to communicate the complexity of their work in a too simplified way. Likewise, the tailoring of content was not always viewed positively: both Swift (2001) and Winch (2001), for example, argue that researchers must not allow the constraints of practicality to 'infect' their beliefs or principles, or to provide outputs that simply lead to policy-makers hearing what they want to hear. However, as Majumder *et al.* (1994) and Council for Science and Technology (2008) note, and as was borne out by the interview responses, any message will be will not be adopted outside of academis if potential users cannot interpret it.

### **6.2.5 – Academics’ and think tanks’ use of the media in order to mobilize social opinion**

One respondent, argued that educational policy-makers have few formal processes in place to interpret the findings of research or to move from “knowledge to action” (Academic #6). At the same time, this same academic observed:

[Research] is only ever going to be more relevant if the decision makers have to attend to it.

(Academic #6)

It was thus argued that, without compulsion, adoption becomes harder to achieve and use of research harder still. It was suggested that one impetus that might encourage policy-makers to pay more attention to, and so adopt research findings, is the mobilisation of social pressure via the media. It was contended, for example, that:

If the public discourse is one where they have to attend to evidence, it’ll be taken account of.

(Academic #6)

Other academics too touched upon the power of the media in order to generate demand for research from policy-makers. For instance:

If you want to get the Department or Ministers to take notice of something actually the Press is... the best route. And there’s quite a lot of evidence. I mean quite often when after a kind of headline we’ll get requests from the DfE for the original papers and so on and you’d never get those requests otherwise.

(Academic #3)

Two academic respondents, however, highlighted the potential dangers associated with employing the media as a mode of communication. One noted that:

No one likes being ambushed and... its [sometimes] hard to get [media] attention unless you have got something fairly combative or scandalous... but then, of course, you may get the whole government media machine shutting down and going against you.

(Academic #11)

A former Minister also observed that:

The trouble is, the Whitehall machine will often take that bit of research which has got an unhappy headline as something to rebut, rather than to read and think about.

(Politician #2)

All academics also argued that certain modes of media (e.g. newspapers) are likely to reformulate findings to suit their particular political framework and that, in many cases, evidence may be used to reinforce a particular stereotype. It was thus regarded as preferable to cultivate relationships with suitable 'trustworthy' journalists:

I've always known people on The Times Ed and sometimes on other papers... who you could kind of talk to and say "Look I think I've got something quite interesting here, you know are you interested?" And then you have a sort of chat.

(Academic #3)

The potential issues associated with employing the media as a mode of communication were also well documented in the literature review (for example, see Mortimore, 2000; Levin, 2004a). However, despite this, one think tank interviewee observed:

The press exists to make juicier stories out of stories that are there... but for us it's a really valuable relationship... even if your story gets slightly distorted it will mean that you get invited to interview about something and you can put across your viewpoint as accurately as you wish... so the positives of our relationship with the media definitely outweigh the negatives.

(Consultancy/think tank #1)



The use of the press or other forms of media to mobilise social opinion represents a strategy designed to negotiate a number of the *internal* and *external* factors faced by researchers looking to facilitate the adoption of knowledge. Chief amongst these is that such use attempts to create a 'demand' for the information: as noted above, interviewees observed that after press exposure, DfE officials were more interested in their work than they were before. This reflects findings from Perry *et al.* (2010: 9), who argue that the identification of the problem and the media's invariable demand for a response will generally force the government to react and so "be seen to be doing something". Use of the press also addresses the issue of 'access' to policy-makers (see sub-section 6.2.6, p. 166) and may also have positive implications in terms of improving the 'credibility' of the author and enhancing the perceived 'quality' of the evidence: policy-makers may assume that the press are most likely to draw upon credible research from credible academics. In addition, by using alternative modes of communication and by allowing a journalist to transform the language used to describe the findings, it is argued that use of the press also helps improve the 'accessibility of the message', the 'clarity of the presentation' and the 'efficacy of the communication' type.

The interview data suggest that the respondents were both more media savvy, and employ the press as a mode of communication, far more than is suggested in the literature review (Commission on the Social Sciences, 2003). But it is also argued that the data correspond with some of the findings of Commission on the Social Sciences (2003) who note that a better and systematic use of the media by researchers may be required, with plans to communicate research findings via the media and the handling strategies for doing so, built into projects at the earliest possible opportunity.

#### **6.2.6 – Locating suitable liaison or access points within government**

Half of the academic respondents suggested that their access strategy, in terms of reaching policy-makers and Ministers, was to find and cultivate suitable liaison points within departments, who could then mediate for them. One noted that:

You find the right people in the right place... and form alliances and work with them.

(Academic #11)

but simultaneously admitted:

You can do it [try and access policy-makers] in lots of different ways and hope for the best really... pot luck comes into it too.

(Academic #11)

This quote confirming points raised by Levin (2004) who contends that, where researchers are not privileged by policy-makers, access may, in part, be driven by chance or by personal contacts already in place.

Two respondents specifically commented that the issue of access was generally compounded by a rapid 'churn' of civil servants through government departments:

There's a lot of turnover of people, personnel, so you may have a contact with one point in time and then you think you may have something that would be of interest to them, you try to contact them and you find they're now working in Agriculture or Foreign Affairs or whatever. And you have to start again from scratch to even find somebody.

(Academic #1)

I think the other thing I've noticed is that there's been a terrific turnover of civil servants in education.

(Academic #3)

The lack of any fixed or defined port of call for academics or other providers of knowledge was also confirmed by the policy-maker in charge of one department's research. These responses suggest that government departments should, as a matter of course, ensure that certain individuals have specific responsibilities to act as access points to researchers. This role could entail signposting researchers to the most appropriate contacts within the department in order that they may present their wares. It may also even involve acting as a matchmaker; setting up researchers' first initial meeting with the appropriate policy-maker. One academic noted that such a liaison point had previously existed:

What we actually need is a kind of link... between the researchers and the DCSF and [Professor Judy Sebba, former government advisor on research strategy for the then Department for Education and Employment] was actually

an extremely valuable person because I think she was trusted by Ministers. And she was able to kind of sift the academic results. And there's been nobody like that since she left to my knowledge although there might be somebody sort of in a cupboard somewhere but I'm not aware of anybody.

(Academic #3)

'Access to policy-makers' was described in section 3.1.7 (p. 55) as a fundamental factor in facilitating the adoption of knowledge (Davies *et al.*, 2000; Levin, 2004; Council for Science and Technology, 2008). Sylva *et al.* (2007), when writing about the *EPPE* study (see Appendix E; p. 240) also demonstrate the importance of researcher access to policy-makers in terms of having knowledge adopted. In the review of literature, access was envisaged to be an *external* factor; one under the direct control of policy-makers. As can be seen from the analysis above, whilst academic researchers do attempt to facilitate access to policy-makers, their approaches are often ad-hoc in nature and tend to rely on chance or personal relationships with officials in the DfE. Given this, it is suggested that whilst researcher strategies to develop access are important, their efficacy will suffer unless reciprocating strategies are also put in place by policy-makers.

### **6.2.7 – The knowledge adoption strategies employed by think tanks**

As has been shown through Davies' (2006) conceptualization of the policy food chain, the interview data and from the work of Rigby, (2005), Campbell *et al.*, (2007) Ball (2008) and Brown (2009), think tanks are highly privileged by policy-makers as sources of evidence. It is also argued by Cohn (2006) that by accepting policy advisor roles within think tanks, academic researchers may vastly improve their chances of influencing public policy. As such, it is useful to examine the knowledge adoption strategies employed by think tanks in order to determine whether academic researchers may benefit from emulating them. In other words, did respondents indicate that think tanks employ alternative strategies to those of academic researchers and, if so, were these perceived to be more fruitful than academics' attempts at forming a knowledge adoption alliance with policy-makers?

Think tank respondents suggested that, on completion of a study, their adoption efforts are directed in the following ways: engagement with the media as a way of reaching policy-makers; face-to-face meetings directly with politicians, which can occur either

‘on demand’ in response to a press release, or through think tanks offering their services directly to the politician or civil service policy-maker in question; meetings with special advisors, which are seen as an effective way “of getting new ideas on a Minister’s radar” (Consultancy/think tank #1)<sup>56</sup> and exploiting opportunities to speak about the work in question at conferences, seminars and round table meetings. Overall, however, interviewees felt that the most impactful actions they undertook, in terms of knowledge adoption, were those that led to the long term development of substantial relationships with politicians.

As noted in sub-section 6.2.5 (p. 164), think tanks also see and use the media as a key mechanism to be employed in promoting their findings and, therefore, to create a demand for them from policy-makers. Where this differs from the opinion mobilisation strategies employed by academics, however, is that think tanks employ a systematic approach to media engagement, backed by appropriate resources:

What’s very important is our media strategy... and we have a media team who support researchers in writing press releases etc.  
(Consultancy/think tank #1)

Academic interviewees, on the other hand, suggested that any support afforded to them in terms of media engagement is often variable. For instance:

[The University] Press Officer, you know if you tell them you’re going to be on a TV programme or something they will assemble a kind of press release and so on. But I think you really need somebody [full time, with a specialist interest in] education... I think that would be good.  
(Academic #3)

Other modes of communication employed by think tanks, however, such as attending conferences or round table meetings, do not appear to be significantly different from those pursued by academics.

As can be ascertained from the above analysis, those operating within think tanks spend a considerable amount of time cultivating relationships with those they wish to influence. This may occur either directly or via other members of the policy making

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<sup>56</sup> As can be seen from Davies (2006) policy food chain, special advisors sit at the top of the policy food chain.

'food chain' (Davies, 2006). It is argued that think tanks developing relationships in this way represents the formation of a 'contextualising' strategy aimed at ensuring that those who are attempting to communicate their findings or ideas are better privileged by policy-makers, compared to other knowledge providers. I now examine the scope and nature of these 'contextualising' strategies more generally in sections 7.1 (p. 171) and 7.2 (p. 175), below.

## **7 – Contextualising strategies and the capacity of academics to engage in knowledge adoption activity**

In this chapter I complete my analysis of the interview data by presenting two themes: an assessment of the validity of the contextualising factors which form the basis of figure iii (first detailed in section 3.3; p. 67) and an analysis of how academics employ contextualising strategies in order that they might successfully deal with or overcome these contextualising factors. I also discuss the notion of capacity and how this affects the ability for academic researchers to engage in any type of knowledge adoption behaviour, including the employment of contextualising strategies and/or the knowledge adoption strategies outlined in section 6.2 (p. 153).

### **7.1 – The validity of the contextualising factors**

In section 3.3, I posit the existence of two *contextualising* factors which come together, as axes, to form the model of knowledge adoption set out in figure iii. These factors are defined as: the social robustness of the knowledge/the amount of evidence that currently exists in a given area and whether this has been synthesized (Gladwell, 2000; Kirst, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Cohn, 2006; Levin, 2008), and; whether the knowledge producer is privileged or highly regarded by policy-makers, recognising that this changes over time (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Rich, 2005; Davies, 2006; Ball, 2008; Exley, 2008; Ball and Exley, 2010).

The importance of these factors was borne out by the interview data. At the same time, however, it was shown that their existence makes problematic the process of knowledge adoption and, consequently, the data revealed the strategies academic researchers employ to negotiate them. I begin my analysis of the *contextualising* factors by examining the impact of: ‘whether the knowledge producer is privileged or highly regarded by policy-makers’.

#### **7.1.1 – The importance of the knowledge producer being privileged or highly regarded by policy-makers**

In discussing the importance of the *contextualising* factors, one policy-maker noted: “you want people of prestige and reputation” (Civil Servant #6). One think tank interviewee also argued that:

You're judged by the quality of your previous work, if you've had the good ideas in the past then people are going to come to you in the future.

(Consultancy/think tank #1)

Academics, too, confirmed that the reputation of a knowledge provider and the regard in which they are held, positively affects how their work is received by policy-makers. As a result, if one is considered reputable, the process of knowledge adoption becomes simpler. For instance:

People are interested in hearing what I've got to say for two reasons; one – over a period of time I've generated a reputation for knowing a lot and being at the forefront of thinking about education... and two – I think this is important for policy-makers, I've actually been there and done it... So those two things plus my writing knowledge do mean that Education Ministers or Prime Ministers are interested to speak to me, so yes absolutely.

(Academic #2)

This quote also reflecting suggestions made by Kirst (2000) that the credibility of researchers is enhanced if they are seen to have acknowledged expertise, including any previous experience they may have had in working within or for government.

All respondents also intimated, as suggested in figure iii, that the factors which need to be negotiated by privileged researchers are fewer and less complex than those which need to be overcome by those who are non-privileged:

I suppose it's the same in any walk of life... you find somebody that you feel is aligned with you and you trust them and therefore you don't need chapter and verse.

(Academic #3)

Again reflecting findings from the literature review (Nutley *et al.*, 2007; Levin, 2008; Brown, 2009) that 'privileged' researchers have more chance of influencing (or have less barriers to overcome in having their research adopted by) policy-makers than those who are not.

### **7.1.2 – The importance of knowledge being regarded by policy-makers as socially robust, of knowledge belonging to a wider corpus of (synthesized) thought and ideas**

The second contextualising factor is the ‘social robustness of the knowledge...’, that is, whether knowledge is understood and widely accepted by society as a whole (Gibbons, 1999) which, in itself, will be a function of its position within a corpus of similar knowledge that exists in a given area or on a given subject (Gladwell, 2000). Again, the interview data affirmed that the level of social robustness of the evidence in question was also key in terms of such knowledge being adopted. As one academic noted:

The topic has got to be pertinent... something that’s very esoteric is unlikely to engage policy-makers unless they are very, very unusual.  
(Academic #10)’

And the idea that bodies or corpuses of knowledge were more influential than the findings of single studies was also touched upon. For example, one policy-maker argued that:

[If a] body of research seems to be coming to compelling conclusions over time [then] this is what we should be doing regarding... kids on free school meals or whatever.  
(Civil Servant #10)

While one former government minister noted from their experience:

Yes research and knowledge is very important, but it’s an accumulation... of knowledge. So, for example, one of the tasks I had as [Minister] was to try to really kick-start an idea that was already there... the [service for young people]... I can’t think of one particular bit of research that made me realise that that was very important... but rather a whole plethora of knowledge about what we know about teenage pregnancy, what we know about juvenile delinquency, what we know about chaotic family structures...  
(Politician #2)



Some third of respondents also felt that within education there had been rapid accumulations of knowledge in certain subjects, such as school effectiveness and system reform, and that this was recognised by policy-makers:

Regardless of the ideology or manifesto or set of commitments you're elected to... there's a body of knowledge which you need to take account of. And that body of knowledge is getting deeper and more refined all the time. There is a growing sense among Education Ministers around the world that they need to get their heads round that.

(Academic #2)

The importance of the accumulation of knowledge also corresponds with the findings of Knott and Weissert (1996) who suggest that single studies are demonstrably ineffective as vehicles for research adoption. A number of other studies have also highlighted the importance of knowledge accumulation (Kirst, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Cohn, 2006; Levin, 2008).

### **7.1.3 – Problematising the contextualizing factors**

It is argued that the nature of the *contextualising* factors is, by definition, policy-maker-centric: that is, it asks whether policy-makers rather than researchers perceive knowledge to be socially robust, whilst also asking who it is that policy-makers privilege. As such, it is suggested that *contextualising* factors are a mechanism for the moderation of power between policy-makers and researchers (Foucault, 1980): authors who are perceived as prestigious are 'privileged' and thus afforded more power by policy-makers; likewise, power is also afforded to socially robust knowledge and ideas, making such ideas more likely to reach the attentions of policy-makers. *Contextualising* factors do not lead to the exclusion of discourse in the way the concept of the agora does; that is, as a binary 'yes/no' such that knowledge will or won't be adopted by policy-makers. However, as figure iii demonstrates, their existence and the researcher's position within them can make the process of adoption relatively more difficult or easier depending on who the researcher is and what they have to say. These issues are explored further in sub-section 8.1.3 (p. 187).

## 7.2 – The development of contextualising strategies

Notwithstanding their role in the knowledge adoption process, the effect of the *contextualising* factors on the chances of an individual knowledge supplier having their knowledge adopted may only be short term in nature: in developing figure iii, it was predicted that the strategies employed by researchers would relate to either the *internal* factors they controlled, or to the *external* factors which they needed to negotiate in order to facilitate the adoption of knowledge. That researchers might also have influence over the *contextualising* factors which come together to form figure iii, had not been considered.

Analysis of the interview data suggests, however, that as well as employ strategies which directly correspond to the factors associated with the adoption of knowledge, academic researchers also engage in behaviours aimed at influencing the social robustness of the knowledge they are looking to promote and whether they, as a knowledge producer, are privileged or highly regarded by policy-makers. One academic involved in the *EPPE* study, for example, spoke ardently about the importance of such strategies:

Its not just presentational skills and being able to talk to people in an engaging way, its [also] doing all the homework of [preparing the ground].

(Academic #15)

And, as a result:

[*EPPE*'s messages are] being promulgated into ground that has been prepared already, not just by the people [communicating the message] but also by the networks to which they belong.

(Academic #15)

This same academic then elaborated by describing one such strategy; the formation of an alliance in early years education. Here a conscious decision was made by the 'Early Years Forum' (an association of academic researchers, professional bodies and other stakeholders looking to influence policy), to ensure that 'early years' had a coherent

and consistent message and that everybody involved in the Forum ‘sang from the same hymn sheet’:

The researchers got together and we said “look, we’re not going to publically go around quarrelling with each other, we’re going to present a united front, we say to government that a lot is known in the early years, we know how children learn best, we know what kinds of environment... we know how to train teachers...” and we didn’t have public squabbles.

And so we really presented a front to the government that said “we have a lot of knowledge, it’s relatively agreed knowledge, you can feel safe, you’re not going with one camp when maybe the other camp was right.

(Academic #15)

This approach, it was claimed, led not only to the development of the ‘early years’ message but also to the maintenance of its integrity, that is, the message was protected from being damaged or undermined by public disagreements or diluted by policy-makers being confronted by conflicting opinions. As a direct result, the social robustness of the ‘early years’ promulgation was enhanced and this paved the way for policy-makers to adopt (and in *EPPE*’s case act upon) ‘early years’ knowledge:

So people say *EPPE* had the right message at the right time [for policy-makers to take it on-board, but] it was located in an early years... profession and research body that was very coherent.

(Academic #15)

The formation of this longstanding alliance also enhanced the reputation, or the ‘brand’, of the researchers involved in *EPPE* and so increased the potential for their being privileged by policy-makers:

So the Minister would ask [a member of the alliance] “oh so what about this *EPPE*?” And [the member of the alliance] would say “very good team, you know they are really excellent, you know they have practitioners... and they really have the respect of the practitioner community”... and all of that is part of the social dynamic, but its procedural and its network.

(Academic #15)

Strategies designed to affect researcher privilege or the social robustness of ideas or areas of knowledge, are considered to be contextualising in nature because they affect the overall context in which a knowledge providers' output is viewed. Further strategies to account for the *contextualising* factors associated with figure iii were also outlined by other academic respondents, and are set out below.

### **7.2.1 – Actions undertaken by researchers in order to increase the likelihood of their being privileged by policy-makers**

It has been noted above (section 5.2.2; p. 128) that politicians typically operate within what is termed the 'echo chamber'. As such, they are likely to be surrounded by lobbyists and others, looking to promote a certain point of view. It was argued by respondents that, in order to be admitted into the 'echo chamber', researchers need to be able to forge effective relationships with the politicians they are seeking to influence, with the success of any attempts likely to be a function of their ability to gain the trust of the policy-maker concerned. As one academic noted:

And the reason that they're so influential is that they, they build up a trust... with various policy-makers, who know that these are people who will either tell them – they'll tell them something useful that respects the perspective of a policy-maker. And that either they'll like them because they'll feel they'll always come in on one side of an issue that they agree with. Or in some cases they like having a neutral – you know somebody they respect as being neutral, when they really want to know an answer to a question. But much less the second than the first.

(Academic #13)

As part of the process of developing trust, academic interviewees suggested that potential influencers often engage in behaviours which enable them to "remain connected and to establish a brand for themselves" (Academic #13): for example, by ensuring that they are present at meetings or seminars where it is known politicians will be in attendance. It was also suggested by respondents that if academics can develop an association with those already inside of the echo chamber, then this may further improve their chances of being privileged and so enhance their potential to influence. In particular, liaison via either teachers' trade unions or think tanks were viewed as effective entry points in order for researchers to be privileged by politicians in the educational arena.

The actions undertaken by academics which relate to privilege are, therefore, primarily concerned with the process of building relationships with policy-makers so that their advice is actively sought and considered. It is contended that this process is distinct from researchers seeking to enhance their academic status via recourse to more 'traditional' academic behaviour (see section 6.1; p. 148), which relates to the *external* factor; 'credibility of the source'. An academic may be considered to have high academic standing but they may not necessarily be privileged by policy-makers if their advice is not considered appropriate.

### **7.2.2 – Actions undertaken by researchers in order to enhance the social robustness of the idea to which their research relates**

In a similar vein, a small number academic researchers described how they would attempt to lobby policy-makers in relation to a particular idea or point of view. One, involved in a programme which evaluates the effectiveness of various teaching and learning programmes noted, for instance, that:

We attempt to influence policy by lobbying the government to use and encourage schools to use programmes that have evidence of effectiveness.  
(Academic #4)

These efforts at lobbying were not designed to specifically advocate the findings of one individual study, but to promote the more general idea that educational programmes, whose efficacy had been proven through research, should be considered a 'good thing'. It was suggested that the actual processes involved in such lobbying included: liaison with think tanks who were regarded as having influence; use of high profile figures and the media; face-to-face meetings with policy-makers and a constant 'social placement' of the idea:

We meet a lot with think tanks who influence policy. We would be lobbying advisors to the Education Secretary. We would do a lot of writing about it.... We meet often with the people at the DfE. And we keep hammering the idea.  
(Academic #4)

### 7.2.3 – The impact of employing ‘contextualising’ strategies

It is argued that the end product of contextualising type behaviour is to shift the position of the researcher within figure iii, from the quadrant they currently occupy to somewhere more favourable. The interview data suggest that policy-makers are most likely to be receptive to ‘socially robust’, synthesised research, which typically sits within a wider corpus of accepted knowledge. Thus the main factors for a privileged researcher to consider in disseminating such research are those *internal* factors associated with its effective communication. The diametrically opposite position, therefore, is where a non-privileged researcher is attempting to inject brand new thought or ideas into the policy making process. Here, as well as the *internal* factors associated with effective communication, the non-privileged researcher also has to consider relevant *external* factors controlled by policy-makers: how to situate the evidence in order to create a demand for it, how the perceived credibility of the source can be maximised, whether the audience has been engaged in policy networks or other forms of user engagement, how to demonstrate the quality of the evidence and how to gain access to policy-makers.

If a researcher finds themselves in this latter position (or another sub-optimal position of figure iii) they are faced with two potential options: attempt to negotiate both the *internal* and *external* factors that influence knowledge adoption, or the longer term strategy of seeking to improve their position. This latter approach will either occur via the researcher becoming ‘privileged’ by policy-makers or by them enhancing the social robustness of the research or ideas to which their research relates (or both); the most favourable shift that may be achieved through such contextualising strategies being the move from the bottom right hand quadrant of figure iii to the top left.

Whilst the importance of the reputation of the researcher (Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Nutley *et al.*, 2007; Levin, 2008; Brown, 2009) and of the social robustness of their knowledge (Gibbons, 1999; Gladwell, 2000; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003) were highlighted in the literature review, no mention was made of strategies which attempt to influence these factors. The analysis above indicates, however, that effective *contextualising* strategies are at least every bit as important to the process of facilitating knowledge adoption as those designed to deal with the *internal* or *external* factors faced by knowledge suppliers who are seeking

to have their knowledge adopted.<sup>57</sup>

### 7.3 – Issues of capacity

Interview data indicate that the success of knowledge adoption efforts are, in part, a function of the capacity, capability and resource of researchers to be able to employ appropriate knowledge adoption strategies. For example, some half of academic respondents touched upon the importance of producing short research briefs (of perhaps 3-4 pages in length) but noted the difficulties involved, and the skills required, in being able to condense research in such an accessible but rigorous way. A similar number discussed the lack of dedicated support available to help them engage systematically with the media. Capacity related difficulties also abound with making research ‘policy ready’, with one academic noting the sheer level of work involved in transforming findings into what civil service policy-makers require:

It’s not a small translation. And I think it would be surprising to people both on the policy side and on the research side, how much work needs to be done to take, even a fairly practical, pragmatic, well established kind of an idea and make it into something that can matter.

(Academic #13)

And this may be problematic when considering the timescales available to researchers for them to developing ‘policy ready’ outputs:

Policy-makers operate in a much shorter timeframe than most educational researchers do. I think the shorter timeframe makes it harder to engage in the kind of thoughtful deliberation that might be required really if you were going to be able to take proper account of research findings and engage in the sort of, perhaps use the sort of practical wisdom that is necessary for producing policy.

(Academic #7)

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<sup>57</sup> It is also suggested from this analysis that, as a result of discussing the existence of *contextualising* strategies, the definition of one of the *contextualising* factors be altered slightly. This is because, as it stands, the *contextualising* factor, ‘social robustness’, is taken to refer to whether a study is situated within, or contributes towards, a wider and ‘socially robust’ corpus of knowledge. It may be more appropriate, however, to refer to a socially robust ‘area of study’ since the interview data suggest that evidence could relate to a socially robust idea or concept, as much as a corpus of knowledge.

In addition 'policy ready' outputs, at their extreme, may require an ability for academics to think about the system as a whole, how evidence from small-scale studies may be extrapolated or generalised so that they may be applied more widely, and how recommendations may be formed as a result. To act in such a way academics may need to develop certain skills or outlooks. It was noted of Professor Sir Michael Barber, during his period as Chief Adviser to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards, for example that:

Michael Barber knew his stuff... but was a supreme pragmatist... and frankly he was into system design which, of course, is not what academics do.

(Civil Servant #2)

Capacity is also a function of the funding available to assist the accessible promotion of research or the translation of research into something that is 'policy ready'. A small number of academics suggested that such funding is limited (this issue was also noted by Nutley *et al.*, 2007 and Sebba, 2007) and, as a consequence, one argued that:

I think it's the responsibility of the government to say "Well, we government are responsible for the actual children and if we want research to make a difference then we need to provide funding and provide encouragement for the researchers to take those additional steps, to take their very good ideas and make them into things that we, policy-makers could use to bring about the outcomes that the public elected us to bring about".

(Academic #11)

As noted above, one solution to the development of 'policy ready' findings may, however, be the employment of third party knowledge brokers (Nutley *et al.*, 2002; Cohn, 2006; Sin, 2008, Ward *et al.* 2009), who can translate research findings into analyses that are regarded as useful by decision makers. This approach thus negates the need for researchers themselves to develop skills in this area. It does however come with a financial cost and leads back to the notion, detailed in sub-section 5.3.6 (p. 143), that policy-makers should be supporting academics with the development of 'policy ready' outputs.



## **8 – Conclusions, implications and next steps**

As noted in section 1.1 (p. 1), the two overarching questions used to guide and delineate this study's general area of investigation have been:

What factors affect the adoption of research within educational policy making?

How might a better understanding of these factors improve research adoption and aid the development of policy?

Four sub-questions were also developed in section 3.7 (p. 88), derived from the literature reviewed in chapters 2 to 3 (pp. 13-89):

- i. Does the concept of the policy agora accurately describe the wider situation which governs whether knowledge adoption is likely to take place in practice?
- ii. Does figure iii (which looks at the interplay between the *internal*, *external* and *contextualising* factors in combination with Social Activity Method) provide a plausible explanatory model of the factors that affect knowledge adoption?
- iii. What strategies are employed by researchers in order to negotiate factors associated with knowledge adoption? Which are most successful?
- iv. What could policy-makers do better to facilitate the process of knowledge adoption?

In chapters 5 to 7 (pp. 117-181) of the thesis I provide an analysis of the data that emerged from the 24 in-depth semi-structured interviews held with policy-makers (politicians and civil servants), academics and other knowledge providers operating within the education policy sphere in England. Overall, the analysis details a number of themes: some (such as those in chapters 5 and section 6.2; p. 153) considered the strategies, requirements and issues associated with academic researchers attempting to 'apply' their research, either to the development of policy, or in more 'traditional' academic endeavours. In particular, the requirements that research outputs be 'policy ready' and the role of policy-makers and academic researchers in facilitating this; also, the incentives in place for academics to engage in 'traditional' academic behaviour and

the tension between these incentives and the requirement by policy-makers for 'policy ready' outputs.

Other themes were concerned with how evidence is 'promoted', or the manner through which it is communicated. For example, the strategies employed by academic researchers in seeking to overcome the *internal* and *external* factors which sit within figure iii and the *contextualizing* factors that come together to form it. The remaining themes, meanwhile, illustrated what is likely to impact upon or constrain any adoption of research, including issues such as: the nature of and mechanics involved with the policy agora and its paradigms of ideological compatibility and epistemological rigour; capacity on the part of academics, and; the nature of the user (in terms of whether they are civil servants, ministers or politicians operating outside of the policy agora).

In this final chapter of the thesis I now use these themes to address my research questions, as well as provide a conclusion to the thesis' more general statement of inquiry. In particular I: assesses whether figures ii and iii, the models which provide context and an overall model of knowledge adoption, have both face validity, and explain the knowledge adoption process; marshal, utilising Social Activity Method, the analysis of the interview data into a set of knowledge adoption strategies which could be employed by academic researchers looking to influence the adoption of policy; summarise the issues associated with inequalities in power relations/discursive control between policy-makers and academics to illustrate how these make problematic the process of knowledge adoption, and; suggest actions policy-makers will need to take in order for the process of knowledge adoption to be made more effective.

In order to achieve these aims I return to the analysis begun in chapters 5 – 7; triangulating interview data with the existing literature reviewed in chapters 2 and 3 and with a critical outlook (invoking the perspectives of Foucault, Ball and Fairclough). In doing so, I use the interview data to expand upon and offer more insight into (or develop theoretical explanations for, or departures from) the existing literature/theoretical field. At the same time, the literature and critical outlook contextualise and add rigour to the interpretation of the data. In addition, this chapter provides a review and critique of the methodology employed, assesses the implications of the findings for the types of social actors involved and outlines areas for future research. I begin by examining the first two of my sub-questions: whether the concept of the policy agora accurately describes the wider situation governing the actualisation

of knowledge adoption? and whether figure iii provides a plausible explanatory model of the factors that affect knowledge adoption?

### **8.1 – Does the concept of the policy agora accurately describe the wider situation which governs whether knowledge adoption is likely to take place in practice?**

**Does figure iii (which looks at the interplay between the *internal*, *external* and *contextualising* factors in combination with Social Activity Method) provide a plausible explanatory model of the factors that affect knowledge adoption?**

Detailed genealogies and descriptions of both the policy agora and figure iii may be found in sections 2.7 (p. 37) and 3.6 (p. 80). Below I outline what the interview data and the literature previously reviewed, suggest with regards to both concepts.

#### **8.1.1 – The policy agora (figure ii)**

The policy agora (Gibbons, 1999; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003) is set out in figure ii and represents the macro context for the adoption of knowledge. The key conclusion drawn from the theoretical development of the model was that evidence-informed policy will, invariably, only be influenced by knowledge sitting within the agora. As such, research studies must be compatible with the ideological and epistemological paradigms which form the dominant agora of the day, in order for their findings to be considered by policy-makers (Hillage *et al.*, 1998; Fairclough, 2000; Lister, 2000; Eurydice Network, 2007; Exley, 2008).

In exploring this notion through the interviews, it was universally agreed by respondents that research findings needed to be situated within the current policy agora for them to be adopted or utilised in the development of policy. Both academics and policy-makers also indicated that those responsible for the development of policy challenge or attempt to squash those findings that are seen as inconvenient, politically, or out of line with current policy. The epistemological paradigm was treated no differently and civil service policy-makers also revealed ways in which research, viewed as epistemologically incompatible, was handled in order that findings might be 'legitimately' dismissed or ignored.

The implications of the existence of the agora correspond with Rigby's (2005) argument that civil service policy-makers filter research through the current dominant ideological discourse. But it adds to this notion by suggesting that research may also be filtered epistemologically; often through the lens of 'what works'. As a result, the agora can be seen to represent a set of borders which serve to delineate between the subject areas and the 'nature' of knowledge to which policy-makers are most likely to attend. Consequently, the agora may be regarded as a mechanism of exclusion, which serves to ensure that the omission of 'incompatible' research from policy development is not questioned (Foucault, 1980; Fairclough, 2000; Lister, 2000; Ball 2007, 2008; Perry *et al.*, 2010). As one academic noted, in creating the agora, ideological and epistemological discourses represent "systematically distorting frameworks" (Academic #7) which promote favoured views to the detriment of others and, as a result, serve to 'cast-out' evidence seen as providing alternatives to politicians' "one obvious sensible way of looking at [things]" (Academic #7). The agora thus determines who knowledge providers may approach with their outputs and when.

### **8.1.2 – Figure iii: a model of knowledge adoption**

Analysing the interview data enabled the face validity of figure iii to be assessed in a number of ways. Firstly through respondent's comments; for example, it was agreed that the adoption of knowledge was a two-way interaction and as one academic researcher noted: "everybody should take responsibility for their part in the process" (Academic #11).

The pivotal importance of each *contextualising* factor was also confirmed: it was suggested within the literature review that the reputation of the knowledge provider is vital to their knowledge being adopted (Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Nutley *et al.*, 2007). This was also born out by the interview data, with one academic noting:

It doesn't mean that you are fireproof, but it does mean that people are more likely to listen to what you've got to say, if they know you have a reputation for doing decent, competent work.

(Academic #10)

Interview data also suggested that such 'privileged' researchers have more chance of influencing and so having their research adopted by policy-makers than those who are not, again reflecting current literature (Nutley *et al.*, 2007; Levin, 2008; Brown, 2009).

At the same time, interview data reaffirmed Gibbons' (1999) suggestion that the level of the 'social robustness' of knowledge is key in terms of it being adopted. In addition, the idea that bodies of knowledge are more influential than the findings of single studies was also touched upon. It is suggested that the importance of the accumulation of knowledge corresponds with the findings of a number of earlier studies (Knott and Weissert, 1996; Kirst, 2000; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Cohn, 2006; Levin, 2008).

Overall these findings, combined with the existence and use of strategies designed to negotiate the *contextualising*, *internal* and *external* factors which form figure iii (e.g. see sections 6.2, p. 153 and 7.2, p. 175) appear to validate the basis of the model. In other words, not only did figure iii ring true with interviewees (i.e. it had face validity), but respondents also behaved in ways which suggest that its description of how knowledge adoption might operate is representative of the social world more generally. That is, they developed strategies and behaved in ways predicted by the model. In particular, the behaviours of respondents indicated that knowledge adoption can be regarded as a contextually specific social process; respondents suggested and also behaved in ways to indicate that different approaches to knowledge adoption are required in different circumstances.

It is also felt, however, that the *contextualising* factors which come together to form figure iii again represent an element of discursive control on the part of policy-makers, since both *contextualising* factors may be considered to be policy-maker-centric. In other words, they ask whether policy-makers, rather than researchers, perceive knowledge to be socially robust, whilst also looking at who it is that policy-makers' privilege. *Contextualising* factors do not exclude discourse in the same way as the agora does. However, as figure iii demonstrates, their existence and the way they contrive the researcher's position to be, relative to that of the policy-maker, can make the process of adoption easier or more difficult depending on who the researcher is and what they have to say. As one academic noted: "I think all this business about being a trusted advisor is actually quite important..." (Academic #3).

### 8.1.3 – Additional implications of the existence and functioning of the agora and of figure iii

A number of other instances of inequalities in discursive control or power relations between academics and policy-makers were also exposed, or their effects came to light, as a result of conceptualising knowledge adoption in the way described by both figures ii and iii. Their manifestation is seen as fundamentally affecting the process and successful facilitation of any adoption of knowledge. The first is the promotion of the 'deficit' model (Levin, 2004; Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Oancea and Furlong, 2007; Brown, 2009). It is argued that this approach hinders the process of knowledge adoption because it leads policy-makers to believe that the majority of adoption efforts should be undertaken by researchers, so making them [policy-makers] less likely to engage in the behaviours required to complete the knowledge adoption transaction. This can occur through: policy-makers failing to develop strategies to help negotiate the *internal* and *external* factors that sit within figure iii; it may materialise via policy-makers requesting that research 'outputs' be 'policy ready' but without aiding researchers to achieve this goal (and these outputs, by their very nature, require researchers to have a good understanding of the policy context); or by critiquing research outputs in terms of the efficacy of their communication (which are, by and large, determined by the incentive structures set in place by policy-makers, such as the Research Assessment Exercise). As such, the promotion of the 'deficit' model of research also hinders the efficacy and efficiency of the knowledge adoption process. In other words, its existence indicates that only one side is actively negotiating to form a policy-maker/researcher alliance.

A second, additional, manifestation of policy-maker power, which forms an integral part of my conceptualisation of knowledge adoption, is the 'move away from traditional expertise/the move towards 'Mode 2' knowledge. Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) use the concept of 'Mode 2' to highlight recent trends in the production of knowledge in which it is now generated in a context of application. Related to the concept of 'Mode 2' knowledge is the concept of 'socially robust' knowledge (which serves as one of the *contextualising* factors which form figure iii). Both the interview data, and the work of Ball and Exley (2010), suggest that the conceptualisation of what is meant by socially robust has materialised via a shift in the types of research discourse deemed appropriate, or to which policy-makers are receptive, with increasing value being placed on easily digestible messages, which are susceptible to immediate implementation. Think tanks are regarded as being specialists in the production of such

messages and are favoured by policy-makers because of this (Commission on the Social Sciences, 2003).

It is argued that the move to 'Mode 2' knowledge, and the 'socially robust' nature of think tank outputs (and that of other, comparable, providers) has led to expectations by policy-makers that all knowledge providers should behave in similar ways; that is, an expectation that all knowledge providers should construct outputs that can be both easily digestible by policy-makers and their impact on the development of policy, immediately apparent. For the purposes of this thesis, these outputs have been defined as 'policy ready'. It was contended that the requirements by policy-makers for 'policy ready' outputs are akin to their 'marketization' of the research process (Fairclough, 1995). A number of academic respondents were vehement in their opposition to the development of 'policy ready' outputs, arguing that the role of the academic was to critique as much as it was to aid. Others were more cautious in terms of how far they were prepared to go beyond the interview data, whilst some appeared to embrace the concept in its entirety. Both Fairclough (2000) and Trowler (2003) note that academic response to this push the 'marketization' of outputs isn't inevitable (and this is confirmed by the interview responses). But, at the same time, the interview data highlight a danger that should academics not wish to succumb to the forces of marketization, the value of their contribution may be ignored or down-graded and alternative ('policy ready') knowledge providers privileged instead (Ball, 2008; Exley, 2008; Ball and Exley, 2010).

The impact of the existence of incentives for academics to produce 'traditional' outputs was also seen to affect the knowledge adoption process. Mortimore (2000) notes that researchers' current use and choice of communication media are invariably driven by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a mechanism established by policy-makers. As academic respondents noted, this, in the main, meant that their research outputs are likely to comprise articles for academic journals and presentations at conferences or events which are academic-centric in nature. Such outputs are thus designed to be read and critiqued by peers rather than by policy-makers or practitioners. Whilst in the 2001 and 2008 RAE exercises there were 'user' members of the panel who participated in the assessment and institutions were also called upon to state how they engaged with policy-makers, most respondents still felt that the majority of the "brownie points" (Academic #10) available were awarded for behaving in a 'traditional' academic way.

Generally, policy-makers interviewed lamented the quality of 'traditional' outputs in terms of their lack of accessibility, excessive detail, convoluted and jargonised discourse and their extensive coverage of issues (such as methodology) for which policy-makers had less concern. As such, it can be seen that there is a tension between producing 'traditional' research outputs and those which may be regarded as 'policy ready' (Kirst, 2000): the request by policy-makers for researchers to move 'beyond the data', for instance, is actively discouraged in order for research to be acceptable to peers and many journals. In addition, approaches such as that taken by Barber and Mourshed (2007) in *How the world's best...*, which was widely acclaimed by policy-makers in terms of its communication style, would most likely be rejected if submitted to an academic journal, because of the lack of methodological detail.

It was argued that the tension faced by academics is not a polemic: 'traditional' academic outputs (such as articles in scholarly journals) may help researchers illustrate how their work sits within any given epistemological paradigm, adding weight to claims of quality or the appropriateness of the methodology employed; outputs can also be differentiated according to audience and thus tailored appropriately. However, such efforts come at the price of not engaging in further 'traditional' behaviour and will require time and other resource, which the researcher may not possess. It was also noted that it will also be interesting to assess whether changes proposed as part of the move to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) will encourage academics/universities to consider the outcomes that might be achieved with their work and so help to reduce the 'traditional' vs. 'policy ready' tension.<sup>58</sup>

#### **8.1.4 – How might inequalities in power be conceived?**

Ultimately, all of the power related factors set out in sub-section 8.1.3 (p. 187) above, can be regarded as a re-enactment/repositioning of Social Activity Method (Dowling; 2005, 2007, 2008, 2008a) at a higher conceptual level. In other words, direct manifestations (or abuses) of power; the instigation of the RAE and the incentivisation of academics to engage in traditional behaviours and the move away from traditional expertise/move towards Mode 2 knowledge combined with the implicit marketization of the research process, can all be regarded as behaviours or strategies which influence relationships on a macro level. Dowling (2008b: 79) allows for this in his analysis

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<sup>58</sup> HEFCE (2010) suggest that the research which gives rise to the impact must be rated 2\* or above in terms of its quality. In other words impact isn't being incentivised at the expense of rigour.



suggesting that SAM, as an approach, can be described as displaying a “fractal quality” (detailed in section 3.5; p. 75). In *What is Enlightenment*, Foucault too notes that “it is well known that control over things is mediated by relations with others” (cited in Rabinow, 1984: 48); relations with others, of course, being the theoretical crux upon which SAM is built. My contention, however, has always been to view knowledge adoption on a micro level, that is, at the level of individual policy-makers and research(ers) with SAM directly relating to the relationship between one policy-maker and one researcher (or their outputs). It is, therefore, simpler to maintain the analysis at this level and so conceptualise these factors as operating outside of the knowledge adoption process. In this sense they are viewed as providing an environment which shapes or nurtures the knowledge adoption strategies which result.

## **8.2 – What strategies are employed by researchers in order to negotiate factors associated with knowledge adoption? Which are most successful?**

The combined effect of these manifestations of power, and thus the nature of knowledge adoption as postulated by the mechanics of figures ii and iii, is that they are seen to lead to academics pursuing strategies that result in promotion and/or application. The interview data suggest, for example, that academics have a number of applications or functions that they are seeking to achieve with their research. As such, application may comprise either the use of research to influence policy, or use of research in a ‘traditional sense’: that is, to develop an academic’s career in reaction to incentives put in place by the RAE and other mechanisms. Likewise, a number of promotion type activities emerged from the analysis of the data. The commonality amongst these latter type of strategies is that they consider how a given viewpoint or position might be influenced: academics may use communication and other strategies to directly promote specific research outputs to policy-makers; promotion may also relate to the academic’s own standing vis-a-vis policy-makers, or to an idea or wider corpus of knowledge in order to enhance its level of social robustness (this type of promotion was particularly pronounced amongst those researchers working as part of the *EPPE* study). Since the strategies of academics relate to either application or promotion and are directed at either developing policy or developing academic outputs/an academic’s career, they may be set out as four essential strategy types. These are labelled in the following way:

- i. Academics providing outputs which attempt to meet policy-makers' and politicians' specific requirements from research, that is, 'policy ready' strategies
- ii. Researchers seeking to effectively communicate and/or use effective techniques or channels to promote their research ('promotional' strategies)
- iii. Academics engaging in 'traditional' academic behaviour ('traditional' strategies)
- iv. Academics attempting to shift their relative position with regards to the *contextualising* factors which come together to form figure iii ('contextual' strategies)

More detail is provided on each behaviour type below.

### 8.2.1 – 'Policy ready' strategies

Strategies under the heading 'policy ready' are designed to increase policy-makers' demand for a given study by improving their [policy-makers'] understanding of how the findings of a study may be applied or utilised. Typically, this will be through the development of 'policy ready' outputs (or the outsourcing of such solutions to knowledge brokers), which enhance the accessibility and usability of the message: in other words the development and communication of solutions to politicians looking to form the next policy agora, or the development and delivery of detailed advice and recommendations to civil servants/Ministers operating within the current agora. As with any effort to influence policy-makers, 'policy ready' outputs are required to be delivered at appropriate points in the political cycle and will need to meet the political requirements of their intended audience in order for them to be adopted. It is argued, however, that, because the nature of these outputs require researchers to move beyond the data (and so employ skills that researchers traditionally have not held, request that researchers engage in non 'traditional' behaviour without providing incentives to do so and move researchers away from the notion of academic independence/'critique of' as well as 'critique for' policy that currently these strategies are the ones least employed by academic researchers. 'Policy ready' strategies are employed by think tanks and other knowledge providers and it is also clear from the interview data that such strategies are the ones most preferred by policy-makers; the implications for this have been noted in sub-section 5.3.6 (p. 143).

### 8.2.2 – ‘Promotional’ strategies

‘Promotional’ strategies relate to the way research is disseminated to policy-makers, both in terms of discursive style or approach and in terms of the techniques or channels employed. As such ‘promotional’ strategies will include: ensuring that research outputs are timely; utilising coding, signalling, marketing or branding to enhance the way in which discourse is presented or may be consumed and providing appropriate levels of detail and strategies to mobilise social opinion. ‘Promotional’ strategies will also include any attempts at developing access points within government and attempts at developing more effective modes of communication, such as the use of new media technologies such as ‘twitter’. It can be seen that ‘promotional’ type strategies in the main relate to and are designed to negotiate those *internal* factors under the direct control of academics. For example: the ‘clarity of presentation’, the ‘accessibility of the message’ or the ‘efficacy of the communication’ type. ‘Promotional’ strategies may also serve to negotiate *external* factors, however; they may increase policy-makers’ ‘demand for the research in question’, enhance the ‘perceived credibility of the source’ by the policy-maker and enhance the perceived ‘quality’ of the evidence.

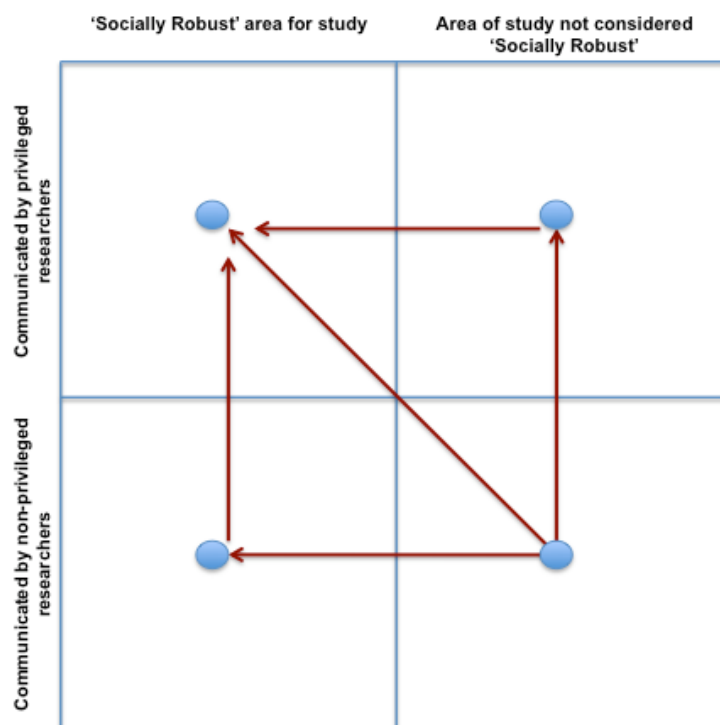
### 8.2.3 – ‘Traditional’ strategies

‘Traditional’ strategies primarily comprise the undertaking of research, the development of theory and the publication of results in academic journals, or via other academic-centric means of communication. It is argued that ‘traditional’ strategies are the ones most prominently employed by academics, because they are incentivised to do so, whilst being those least favoured by policy-makers who find them the less accessible. As a result, if the focus of researchers is purely on the academic-centric communication of their findings, then any adoption of knowledge disseminated in ‘traditional’ ways is likely to be policy-maker initiated and so demand led (and, therefore, limited in scope). ‘Traditional’ strategies will, however, enable researchers to illustrate the ‘quality’, rigour and methodology of their work, show how research findings sit within the current epistemological paradigm and will enhance the academic ‘credibility’ of the researcher in question; all of which are key *external* factors.

### 8.2.4 – ‘Contextual’ strategies

‘Contextual’ strategies move to attempt to improve the reputation of the researcher or the social robustness of the idea that their research pertains to, rather than directly involve any attempt to communicate the findings of a specific project. As a result of such behaviour, academics may see their position in relation to figure iii improved and will find it easier to affect the adoption of knowledge moving forward. This is illustrated in figure v, a version of figure iii, below. Here it can be seen that from the least optimal position, the bottom right hand corner (where the area of study is not socially robust and the academic in question is not privileged) that contextualising strategies can lead academics to move in three possible directions: improving the social robustness of the area of study, ensuring that the researcher is privileged by policy-makers or both. Moves can also be made from other starting points, but in all cases the desired finishing point is that of the top left hand corner.

**Figure v: The impact of contextualising strategies**



**Key:** Figure v illustrates the effects of the contextualising strategies which, when implemented, result in a shift, in the position of the researcher with regards to the knowledge adoption scenario they are likely to face.

An assessment of the interview data suggests that it is only academics working in a limited number of areas who have or are actively developing contextualising strategies: of those interviewed, it appeared to be predominantly researchers involved on the *EPPE* study, those involved in EPPI and TLRP and those working for the Institute for Effective Education. Since these strategies appear to be successful in enhancing a researcher's overall position in terms of figure iii, it is suggested that perhaps academe generally could benefit from adopting these strategies more often.

### 8.3 – The application of Social Activity Method to the research findings

It was noted in section 3.5 (p. 75) that researchers employing Dowling's approach are required to organise their data into a matrix of 'ideal types' which summarise the relationships and strategies employed in a given setting in a logically complete way. Most examples of SAM tend to involve a 2x2 matrix, examples of which can be found in Dowling (e.g. 2005, 2007, 2008a) and in Appendix F (p. 242). The four strategies outlined above can thus be presented in the following way, with the axes of the matrix determined by the aim of the strategy; promotion or application, and whether this strategy is directed at enhancing the development of policies or aimed at more traditional behaviour:

**Figure vi: Social Activity Method matrix**

	<b>Application</b>	<b>Promotion</b>
<b>Development of policy</b>	Policy ready	Promotional
<b>Development of career</b>	Traditional	Contextual
	<b>Aimed at using research for a given purpose</b>	<b>Aimed at changing a given view or position</b>

**Key:** Figure vi illustrates the four knowledge adoption strategies that researchers might employ when seeking to negotiate the knowledge adoption scenarios set out in figure iii (p. 82). Strategies are determined by whether they are geared towards

It should be noted that, whilst presented as ‘ideal types’, these four strategies are not designed to be mutually exclusive and Dowling (2005) himself argues that the constituent parts of any matrix simply represent the totality of the strategies that emerge from engaging with the empirical, rather than any unique set of behaviours. It is thus entirely feasible for a researcher to attempt to seek to provide ‘policy ready’ solutions whilst also developing their career via publication in academic journals etc. It is also argued that some actions may stretch across one or more strategies. For example the processes of “user engagement” (Pollard, 2004; Edwards *et al.*, 2007; Sebba, 2007; Rickinson *et al.*, 2011) relates to ‘promotional’ strategies (by acting as a way of communicating to policy-makers), ‘policy ready’ strategies (by helping to ensure that a study and its outputs are shaped by the requirements of policy-makers) and ‘contextual’ strategies (by enhancing both the researcher and the topic in the mind of the researcher).

The most fruitful way to facilitate knowledge adoption will depend upon where in figure iii researchers find themselves. For example, if researchers are situated in the least optimal position; the lower right hand quadrant, where neither they or their ideas curry favour, then they may wish to seek to employ all four strategy types: ensuring findings are ‘policy ready’ by transforming them into outputs which are both digestible and susceptible to implementation and ensuring that these are politically compatible; developing ‘promotional’ strategies so that the efficacy of the mode or method of communication/dissemination is maximised and developing ‘contextual’ strategies so that, in the longer term, the nature of the idea or knowledge becomes more socially robust or the voice behind that idea becomes privileged. In addition, ‘traditional’ strategies may enhance perceptions surrounding the quality or rigour of a study, as well as an academic’s standing as a researcher. Conversely, academics who are situated in the top left hand corner may only wish to develop ‘policy ready’ outputs and ensure ‘promotional’ strategies are in place so that these are well communicated since they may feel that no further effort is needed, either in promoting themselves, or the knowledge/idea they wish to be adopted. As an illustration, the knowledge adoption strategies employed by Barber and Mourshed (2007) and by researchers working on the *EPPE* study are set out in Appendix N (p. 274).

The ability for academic researchers to successfully engage in any of these strategies will, however, be a function of their capability and capacity to act. For instance, whether academics have the capacity to undertake the level of work involved, or whether they have the skills required to be able to quickly transform findings into ‘policy ready’

outputs, given the perceived lack of financial (or other) support from government to aid this process. It was noted by *EPPE* respondents that, in terms of their particular study, government funding had been provided to ‘buy out’ researcher time in order to free up resource which then could be used to action these strategies. It was argued that, without this funding, researchers would have struggled to promote their work or develop effective outputs. In section 7.3 (p. 180) it was suggested that in some cases it may be appropriate for researcher to ‘out-source’ some strategies to others, such as knowledge brokers, who may be able to perform the role more effectively. This, however, may require financial resource.

#### **8.4 – What could policy-makers do better to facilitate the process of knowledge adoption?**

It was argued above that ‘power’ can manifest itself in a number of ways throughout the process of knowledge adoption (Foucault, 1980). Some of these manifestations, as outlined in sub-section 5.2.1 (p. 126), may be regarded as part and parcel of the process of policy making. For example, that knowledge must be ideologically and epistemologically compatible for it to be adopted (Rigby, 2005; Perry *et al.*, 2010) and that certain ideas and knowledge providers are likely to be privileged over others (Gladwell 2000; Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Landry *et al.*, 2003; Cohn, 2006; Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Nutley *et al.*, 2007; Levin, 2008). As such, they may be seen to shape the environment for knowledge adoption, rather than fundamentally make problematic its operation. There are, however, two areas in which policy-makers are currently failing to act to facilitate the process of knowledge adoption: where policy-makers request that research ‘outputs’ be ‘policy ready’ but without aiding researchers to achieve this goal, and where policy-makers currently fail to develop strategies to help negotiate the *internal* and *external* factors that sit within figure iii. These are detailed below.

##### **8.4.1 – Views on policy-makers’ desire for ‘policy ready’ outputs**

It is suggested that it is reasonable that users might have specific desires of a product or output, but there was no apparent recognition from policy-makers that they might have a role to play in assisting academic researchers to achieve the ‘policy ready’ outcomes they sought. As one academic noted:

They're in the privileged position of knowing that the world at large is going to come to them, having already summarised [and made] the information very easy and palatable for them.

(Academic #13)

From the viewpoint of policy-makers, it seemed that academics should know what is required or be branded "hopeless" (Civil Servant #6), despite the fact that it must surely be the role of government researchers working alongside policy-makers, if not policy-makers themselves, to specify and work with academics to help them produce such outputs. This is particularly the case for commissioned research; for example, it was noted by Sylva *et al.*, 2007, that in the case of the *EPPE* study, interactivity and partnership between researchers and policy-makers were key factors to the adoption and use of findings by policy-makers.

Discursive control on the part of policy-makers thus appears to have created and maintained a paradigm, in which the accepted argument is that the majority of knowledge adoption efforts should necessarily be undertaken by researchers, because it has been their lack of application in this area which has led to a dearth of evidence-informed policy making. This paradigm was described by one academic as the "deficit model of research" (Academic #10), and this same academic also noted that as a result of this model:

there's been an awful lot of emphasis on improving communication from the research side... but there's been nothing like the same attention given to policy-makers' receptiveness... so that they are willing to even engage with some of the research findings that come out... The emphasis is on research deficits, not on policy-makers themselves, how they might be stimulated to take into account the work that is out there.

(Academic #10)

#### **8.4.2 – Policy-makers' failure to develop effective knowledge adoption strategies**

This paradigm or viewpoint was also apparent in other strategies or behaviours employed by policy-makers. For example, there were no obvious or advertised 'organisational level' access points, or ways for academic researchers to feed their



research findings into the DfE. It was noted both in the interview data, and the literature review, that access to policy-makers is an essential part of the knowledge adoption process. Access is also regarded as being an *external* factor, under the control of policy-makers and, consequently, further effort may be required by policy-makers to improve the ways in which they may be accessed. I return to these points in section 8.6 (p. 200), which provides suggestions for further research.

## 8.5 – Summary and implications

The process of knowledge adoption and its efficacy should be considered essential precursors to the development of evidence informed policy. Understanding adoption as a process: how it operates and how efforts in this area can be improved, is vital, both for researchers wishing to influence policy, and for policy-makers seeking to improve the efficacy, effectiveness and equitability of their policies (Oxman *et al.*, 2009). However, whilst knowledge adoption is considered to be the result of the formation of an alliance (or an act of partnership) between policy-makers and researchers, as a process it is heavily constrained and shaped by a number of ‘exogenous’ factors. These include the ideologies and epistemologies favoured by policy-makers, inequalities in power relations between policy-makers and researchers and asymmetries in discursive control between these two groups.

These factors impact on the nature of the research likely to be adopted, who and what policy-makers are likely to favour, and the modes of communication to which they are likely to be most receptive. As such, they also impact on how equal the terms of a policy-maker/researcher alliance might be and the nature and extent of the efforts required by those involved. These ‘exogenous’ factors have thus been instrumental in shaping the four knowledge adoption strategies which should be utilised by academics: the creation of ‘policy ready’ outputs, the continued use of traditional outputs, promotional strategies to disseminate evidence to policy-makers, and ‘contextual’ strategies. Ultimately, therefore, for researchers seeking to influence policy, the existence of these factors may mean accepting that in many areas of adoption they must target their efforts to meet the needs of policy-makers rather than expect that policy-makers will embrace all research in the myriad of ways and formats in which it might be presented to them.

Because of the focus of the empirical work, I have only had the opportunity to touch upon implications for policy-makers. Of prime concern, however, is the requirement for

this group to understand the need for, and to embrace the concept of, partnership working. That is, if policy-makers are serious about utilising evidence in the development of policy, they must also play their part in how knowledge might be adopted. Since the adoption process is seen to be one of partnership, the next tranche of work in this area should involve expanding this analysis to the role of/for policy-makers more widely (detailed in sub-section 8.6 below). For government researchers, since their role is to facilitate knowledge adoption, it is argued that the implications set out above are analogous to those for academic researchers. As such, this group should consider how they might adopt comparable strategies to those prescribed for academics, bearing in mind their roles as commissioners and knowledge intermediaries.

Finally, the analysis and conclusions from this study relate directly to the sphere of educational research and to educational policy making. It may be possible, however, to further generalize and to argue that my findings might also have implications for other policy sectors within England and Wales (such as health, justice, social care etc.) or even for other policy jurisdictions. Given the lack of data to support any such assertions, I suggest that they may only stand as theoretical arguments, heavily laden with assumption: for example, having had experience of policy making within the justice policy realm (England and Wales), it seems probable that the models I have developed and the findings I have reached could also apply there. Assuming that most UK government departments (i.e. including those in Northern Ireland and Scotland, which share commonalities in genealogy to the government departments in England and Wales) operate in a similar way to education and justice, then it may also be possible that my findings will have salience across UK central/devolved national government. Likewise, it might be feasible to conclude that in many other systems of government which share, as a common basis, an elected political elite and a permanent civil service charged with serving that elite, and which boast an independent higher education sector and other providers of 'evidence' (and importantly, where there are cultural similarities across the piece) that my work will resonate. Beyond those systems, however, any further attempts at generalization seem perilous and, I suggest, can only feasibly be undertaken by those familiar with such systems, who have read this work and who, through vicarious experience, can relate these findings to their own areas of interest (Stake, 1995).

## 8.6 – Suggestions for further research

It is suggested that further research is required in order to examine what policy-makers might do to better facilitate the process of knowledge adoption. In particular to look at the knowledge adoption strategies policy-makers do or should employ and how they might better develop relationships with academics. For example, it was argued within the literature review that capacity to adopt evidence must exist, not only at the level of the individual policy-maker level, but also encouraged through the culture or behaviour of the organisations within which those policy-makers are situated (Lavis, 2006; Campbell *et al.*, 2007; Nutley *et al.* 2007; Sin, 2008; Brown, 2009; Ouimet *et al.*, 2009; Rickinson *et al.*, 2011). One policy-maker operating within their department's research function noted:

I have a policy team who are responsible for, among other things, a big "Making Policy Happen" programme, which is about training up the policy teams to use evidence and analysis effectively... and improve the capacity of policy-makers to use evidence and analysis.

(Civil Servant #5)

This indicates that strategies are in place to enhance this aspect of knowledge adoption, both at an individual level and through changes to organisational culture. At the same time, as has been noted above, policy-makers appear to have neglected to negotiate other key *internal* or *external* factors associated with knowledge adoption. For example, access strategies may be limited or non-existent.

Indications of policy-makers' attitudes and strategies within this area may be derived from a number of sources including a report from the Government Office for Science (2010). This suggests that within DfE there is a "there is strong and active leadership support for evidence-based policy-making" (2010: 22). It also provides a number of examples of good practice/strategies employed in the use of evidence by policy-makers (including the aforementioned 'Making Policy Happen Programme'), as well as areas for improvement.

To extend this investigation it is suggested that what is required is the development of an equivalent strategy matrix for policy-makers as figure vi provides for researchers. From this it might be possible to understand the totality of the knowledge adoption strategies in existence (i.e. those employed by both policy-makers and academic

researchers); whether these strategies are primarily conducive to knowledge adoption or not, and which are most commonly employed. For example, taking the strategies that form figure vi; if all academics always engaged in 'traditional' behaviours or solely produced 'traditional' outputs then occurrences of knowledge adoption would be rare but feasible. However if, in addition, the development of a matrix similar to figure vi suggests that policy-makers also have an equivalent to 'traditional' strategies (e.g. if they regarded their primary role as being solely to develop policy to meet the needs of Ministers, rather than develop policy based on the best evidence available) and predominantly employed these strategies then it is likely that knowledge adoption would be close to non-existent (with the converse being true for 'policy ready' type strategies). Any such study should also include an analysis of the role and behaviours of government researchers.

### **8.7 – Reflections on the approach and methods employed in this study**

It was originally envisaged that the methodology employed by this thesis would be that of the case study. It was felt, however, that my primary reliance on semi-structured, in-depth, interviews precluded any ability to triangulate the data in the way required by adopting the case-study as an approach (further detail is provided in Appendix I; p. 247). Triangulation of the interview data with other sources might have been achieved via a number of ways: firstly through document analysis in order to provide examples of where academically rigorous studies have successfully influenced policies and examples of those which have failed to do so. Document analysis would have enabled a differentiation to have been made between what respondents say in interviews and how they actually act. In addition, participant observation could have assisted my empirical engagement with academics or knowledge providers, to help assess where and how knowledge adoption is considered as part of the research process (Polski, 1967; Gibson, 2009). Again such an approach would have enabled me to enter the 'life world' of academics and so begin to better understand why and how decisions are made and thus why social actors behave as they do.

Brown and Dowling (1998) illustrate the difference between constructing representative samples, and purposeful samples of 'critical cases' which correspond directly to the theoretical requirements of the project. For this thesis, the sample was chosen because potential interviewees were considered by myself and my tutor to have well known views on this area/evidence informed policy making more generally (or it was

concluded from the literature that this was the case). Future projects may also benefit from considering the views of those who do not actively consider knowledge adoption/evidence informed policy making on a day-to-day basis. This may then capture the wider, less annunciated views held by policy-makers/knowledge providers more generally. At the same time, whilst a full range of knowledge providers was considered, the emphasis was on policy-makers and academics. A wider and more diverse sample might include a higher concentration of those sitting at various levels in Davies' (2006) policy 'food chain'; such as social actors involved in the media or with professional associations, and others integral to the knowledge production/knowledge adoption process (such as consultancies, knowledge brokers etc).

## **8.8 – The impact of this research on the author**

Undertaking this research has fundamentally affected how I view the process of knowledge adoption, with its biggest impact being to enable me to critically address how I approach academics and academic output. As a government researcher I had always striven to provide proactive, contextualised and tailored output. I had always sought to keep messages simple and to ensure that outputs address and make recommendations concerning the policy problem at hand. As a policy-maker I have shared the frustrations of my colleagues at what I have perceived to be general academic obfuscation. Now, however, as I immerse myself in academe and attempt to embark on my academic career, I have begun to see the picture from the other side: I can now critically assess my original opinions (and those of the wider corpus of policy-makers/government researchers) and have begun to question previously made assumptions and templates of the world I had, in the past, believed to be simply the 'way things are'.

A particular revelation has been, through the adoption of a reflexive approach, to understand how power and discursive control help shape reality and, in the case of this thesis, how policy-makers can expect that particular behaviours are routinely engaged in by less powerful groups and the consequences for those less powerful who do not perform as required. I regard this thesis as a vital step in my academic learning curve and I hope to be able to build upon its foundations. I also note, however, that in its current format; designed to be assessed in conjunction with academic research criteria, this thesis is not presented in a way that might be regarded as 'policy ready'. Future work will therefore necessarily involve both the 'traditional' production of journal articles to enhance my academic career, as well as the production of my findings in formats

that policy-makers can digest, engage with and use (conceptually) in order that my work can also make a practical difference.

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## **10 – Appendices**

## **Appendix A: Issues of epistemology and ontology**

### **A.1 – Problematising positivism and the notion of ‘what works’**

I begin my analysis of the implications of differing epistemological and ontological viewpoints on the process of policy development, by examining the epistemology most commonly associated with evidence-informed policy making; that of positivism. In describing positivism Giddens (1974) outlines three key principles that identify a positivistic approach or method. These are: a scientific outlook – that is, research techniques should be as scientific as possible, describing the world without error and be able to define actuality and causality; that generalizations are desired and that these must describe the world in ‘law-like’ ways – that is, the findings from one situation can be used to accurately predict the behaviour of other similar situations, and; that research is value neutral and objective – that is, that the findings of research describe the real underlying world, which itself is not subject to interpretations or value statements. Roth and Mehta (2002) thus contend that a positivist analysis will seek to hypothesise and then evaluate causal inferences about social phenomena so that they will be generalizable beyond the specific data analysed. They also note that the assumption of the existence of an objective reality and facts implies that these can be known or approximated through scientific or quantitative research methods. Analyses must, therefore, be both replicable and testable across cases and the validity of the analysis evaluated accordingly.

The emergence and broad acceptance of interpretivism, that is, the notion that the social world and the self are constructed through processes of interaction and interpretation, as an epistemological alternative to positivism (Hammersley, 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Charmz, 2006; Gibson, 2008a) has led Dunne *et al.* (2005: 15) to argue that positivism is now incompatible with a “relativised and globalised world”. Paradoxically, however, Dunne *et al.* (2005: 15) also suggest that positivism has been subject to somewhat of a rebirth by providing the empirical basis for the ‘what works’ discourse adopted both by the previous New Labour government and the current coalition administration. As noted in section 2.3 (p. 19), this is reflected in speeches made by Blunkett (2000), Balls (2009) and Gove (2010), all of whom have been, or are currently, Secretaries of State with specific responsibilities for education.

A positivistic ‘what works’ approach has been even more explicitly adopted in the United States where, as Biesta (2007) notes, the 2001 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* – popularly known as *No Child Left Behind* – has led to a preference and increased funding, for randomised controlled field trials.<sup>59</sup> Biesta (2007) claims that, in the main, such preferences stem from the idea that it is effective interventions that are central to the concept of evidence-informed practice. Thus, in order to determine ‘what works’, researchers have been compelled to provide both cause and effect and it is argued by Federal government that the only methods suitable for such a purpose involve experimental or statistical manipulation.<sup>60</sup>

The desire by policy-makers’ to discover ‘what works’ is viewed as contentious by a large swathe of academics. Whitty *et al.* (2009: 4) notes, for example, that whilst few are likely to disagree that educational research should be undertaken to improve educational provision, “sometimes it is technocratic obsession with ‘what works’ that worries researchers rather than the notion that research should have some impact outside the Academy”. The adoption of ‘what works’ by policy-makers has also led Dunne *et al.* (2005: 16) to conclude that:

Thus, what we have is an academy that is grappling with the complexity of late modern life and an executive that prefers the simplicities of objectivism, naturalism and neutral, true description. Throughout the public service there is a pervasive culture of vernacular positivism that constructs the social as a single measurable and knowable reality.

This can therefore lead to situations in which researchers find themselves operating within an epistemological framework with which they might not necessarily agree.

The conceptual ‘frailties’ associated with ‘what works’ epistemology have also been expanded upon by others. Hammersley (2001), for example, suggests that as a

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<sup>59</sup> As a testament to the extent of its positivistic underpinnings, Slavin (2002) notes that *No Child Left Behind* mentions the phrase “scientifically based research” 110 times.

<sup>60</sup> It should be noted, however, that the latest Director of the US Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences – John Q. Easton – has indicated that randomised experiments should now only form one part of the agenda alongside context and relevance. This will enable an understanding of why a programme or initiative has or hasn’t worked and how useable it might be to policy-makers and practitioners. It has also been suggested by Mr Easton that when the next competition for federal funds opens in 2010-11, the specified requirement for researchers to undertake randomised control trials will be dropped. See: <http://www.edweek.org/login.html?source=http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/12/02/13ies.h29.html&destination=http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2009/12/02/13ies.h29.html&levelId=2100>

consequence of the adoption of 'what works', qualitative research and as Whitty (2002) notes, the reasons for why something works, is likely to be pushed to one side. While both MacLure (2005) and Biesta (2007) contend that the concept of, and the processes involved with, identifying 'what works' (in particular through systematic reviews) rely on the assumption that the researcher can be free of bias, a notion that has been challenged by those of more constructivist leanings (for example, see Geertz, 1993). In addition it has been seen as problematic to simply assume that the interpretation of data can be limited to a simple reading which is then taken to represent some facet of the real world. To this end it is suggested that the 'true' process of interpretation is concealed by positivistic methods and procedures to ensure validity and reliability. This makes, as Stronach and MacLure (1997: 35) note, "the appearance of artlessness... a rather artful business". Sharland and Taylor (2006) also suggest that the pursuit of 'what works' is based on the belief that not only can factual evidence be found or discovered and as MacLure (2005) notes, synthesized in a way that is impervious to contextual ambiguity, but that predictive theories of cause and effect can be developed on the back of such evidence. This may be regarded as problematic when considering the complexities and constructivist nature of social reality.

In summarising the above, critiques of both positivistic epistemology and a 'what works' approach, stem from what is seen as the inappropriate application of the scientific method when attempting to understand social reality, from the notion that we can never be truly objective or free of bias and from the idea that all research accounts are mutually created with respondents and so contextually specific. In other words there is a rejection of a 'modernist' world defined by cause and effect, moved by rational processes and, on the basis of these things, able to define and transform itself.

Such critiques typically originate from a poststructural or postmodern perspective. In defining poststructuralism, Hammersley (1995: 14-15) states that:

[Poststructuralism] can be defined negatively in terms of what it rejects. It denies the possibility of any kind of universally valid knowledge of the kind proposed by advocates of the scientific model. It insists not just on the relativity of all knowledge claims but also that knowledge is a product of desire or power...

Mirchandani (2005) suggests that the adoption of a poststructural perspective depends upon the realisation that what we can claim to know is simply dependent on the

language we use and how we represent what is empirically experienced. These views stem from the work of Derrida (1966), who argued that what we had always assumed were 'natural' templates for the world are simply our current epistemological representations of it. Thus, in the same way that Kuhn (1962) exposed the paradigmatic nature of scientific progression, so postmodernist/poststructuralist writers have attempted to refute the positivistic idea that it is possible to hold a mirror up to the social world and reveal 'the truth'. As Stronach and MacLure (1997: 100) note, such approaches regard notions of valid and representative knowledge as somewhat "suspect and either utopian or repressive expressions of whatever 'regime of truth' [is currently in operation]". Knowledge is, in a postmodernist/poststructuralist world, always representational and consequently, as Mirchandani (2005) maintains, complex and fractured, and so uncertain.

But what are the consequences for policy development of adopting postmodernist/poststructuralist epistemology, which favours such a relativistic view of knowledge? Constan (1998: 26) acknowledges that the postmodernist/poststructuralist movement has provided educational researchers with a "most destabilizing and profound set of challenges" which, in many cases, has led to a period of reflection and reflexivity in which both researchers' assumptions and the political consequences of such assumptions have been re-examined and questioned. However, Humes and Bryce (2003) maintain that the introduction of postmodernism has also had a number of unfortunate consequences, chief amongst which they argue, is the promotion of ambiguity and indeterminacy to 'cult status' at the detriment of rational and ordered enquiry. In other words, if, as Hammersley (1995) suggests, all knowledge is relative, then the findings of one study cannot be judged over another and so any conflicts or differences in the findings of two or more studies cannot effectively be resolved. At the same time, Humes and Bryce accuse postmodernism of according too much value to the qualitative or narrative understanding of a particular local situation (and its context) as an alternative to a generalized understanding of processes. Thus a postmodernist approach, they argue, ultimately results in research which cannot be used to explain anything other than the situation from which it was generated: which, as Trowler (2003) notes, is unlikely to give policy-makers confidence in taking on board any findings. As Cooper *et al.* (2009) contend, therefore, in the world of policy development, which requires quick action and speedy decision-making, strict relativism ultimately leads to total paralysis.

Postmodernists/poststructuralists themselves highlight the value of reflexivity in moving away from the uncertainties of the absolute relativism associated with Hammersley's definition of poststructuralism, to a situation where Dunne *et al.* (2005: 87) suggest "reflexivity works to allow us to make informed interpretations of what we experience, observe and feel". Simultaneously, whilst epistemological postmodernism represents a concern with knowledge, Mirchandani (2005: 99) argues that "empirical postmodernism is mobilized by the idea that there is something unique about contemporary conditions". Postmodern research has therefore attempted to engage or explore the empirical in new and different ways, looking at characteristics of the world that appear to be the direct result of modern society: for example, in examining the implications of the reorganization and concatenation of time and space or the emergences of risk and uncertainty.

With regards to policy development, Stronach and MacLure (1997), for example, use all of the aforementioned concepts of time, space, risk and uncertainty to demonstrate the myriad of complex processes that affect the way policy is developed. In doing so they coin the term 'policy hysteria' to show how policy development occurs via a flux of successive reforms which employ a discourse of displacement. Such a discourse simultaneously invokes notions of nostalgia in order to hark back to a bygone 'golden age', whilst predicting a catastrophic near future (often involving economic failure), which must be avoided at all cost. In doing so, Stronach and MacLure (1997) demonstrate how the process of policy making follows Foucault's (1978; 1980) rejection of a 'modernistic' or traditional, linear or evolutionary perspective, in favour of discontinuities and diverse and multidimensional histories. Mirchandani (2005: 110) concludes, therefore, that it is when empirical and epistemological postmodernism come together that modern themes and phenomena are successfully explored whilst simultaneously ensuring that "sociology's search for generalization, if not universalism, is not changed, just tempered". There is therefore, as Mirchandani notes, a new modesty and openness surrounding the absoluteness of conclusions.

## **A.2 – Ontological positions which may form the basis of policy-makers' conceptions of social reality**

In addition to their suggestion that evidence-informed approaches are necessarily positivist in nature, Dunne *et al.* (2005) also claim that there has been a conflation of realist ontology and epistemology by policy-makers. This argument has been formed

through taking Elliott's (1991: 19) view that, in conjunction with an emergent culture of positivism, there has also been a "widespread emergence of fundamentalism... evident in most of the 'reforms' now sweeping our social institutions". Such reforms, Mortimore (2000) suggests, included, under the previous government, raising standards, increasing diversity and choice and increased accountability of teachers. In addition, Ball (1997) adds the concepts of new managerialism, motivating social actors to both produce and strive for excellence (and quality) and the development of a culture of self-interest. Dunne *et al.* (2005) suggest that such dogmatic reforms create an implicit, unquestionable ideology, which forms the basis of an ontological perspective and so drives the epistemological requirements for evidence. That is, for evidence that details 'what works' to improve the existing, albeit ideologically perceived, situation. This resultant ontology has been described by Scott (2000) as 'naïve realism'.

Perry *et al.* (2010) acknowledge that politicians are driven by ideology, but I also suggest that policy making, by its very nature, depends on the ability of government to make decisions which, when implemented, have material effects on the lives of its citizens. As Ball (2008: 13) notes, policies "play their part in the construction of a social world of meanings, of causes and effects, of relationships, of imperatives and inevitabilities". This then rules out, for policy-makers, any ontological viewpoint that may be considered relativistic in nature. In other words one which suggests that all experience, thought, evaluation, or even reality is always relative to something else. This is because a standard critique of relativism as the basis of an ontological position is that, while fully understanding the ways in which people make sense of the world may be problematic, uncertain and subject to revision, to dismiss that the social world has real and consequential effects on the actions of social actors fails to truly reflect the way that people go about their lives (Moore and Muller, 1999).

But other ontological positions which are neither naïve in their realism, or unhelpful in the extent of their relativism, do exist and can plausibly be used as ways of reflecting how policy-makers view the social world and, consequently, the role of policies in altering it. Moore and Young (2001), for example, refer to 'social realism' as an alternative approach that grounds social objectivity in the practices of communities. As a result, a social realist approach would argue that what communities regard as true should be considered as true. Thus, if the population of a society share a similar family of norms, values and rules, it is easy to both develop and implement suitable policies that will actually work to bring about change. This viewpoint is expanded upon by Weiss (1998: 30) who notes that "conditions and interpretations differ but there is

enough commonality across people, programmes and organisations to make a functioning social world possible". Scott (2000), meanwhile, posits 'transcendental realism' as a position that allows us to maintain the existence and independence of the real (since social reality is viewed as broadly stable) whilst assuming that epistemological positions change according to the cultural or social milieu dominant or inhabited at a given point in time. As a result, Scott (2000) argues that findings or beliefs can be revised at a later date: consequently, those who hold such an ontological position can hold epistemological positions that 'traditionally' have been associated with alternative ontologies; for example, realists who believe in social-constructivism.

Whilst I have only touched upon a fraction of the alternative postulated ontologies that exist, I suggest that it is feasible to conclude that there are stable social norms and behaviours that exist within communities and which are commonly and jointly experienced as 'social reality'. As Dunne *et al.* suggest, "we can assume the world we live in is pretty much the world that our neighbours inhabit", (2005: 19). In summarising the arguments set out within this appendix, I firstly suggest, therefore, that it is unlikely that policy-makers, as with any other populace of social actors, will view the world through extreme ontological or epistemological perspectives: what matters in the world of policy making is that policy-makers are driven by certain beliefs and that the general populus, rooted as they are within their society's norms and behaviours, will respond to such policies in ways that have been broadly envisaged or predicted by those policy makers (or that can be feasibly accounted for retrospectively). Simultaneously, in conjunction, government departments are also likely to seek out research findings that may be generalizable in order to help them develop or inform policies that may be rolled out on a nationwide basis.

I also contend, however, that as part of my latter suggestion, policy-makers need to realise that even the most emphatic quantitative conclusions will always be tentative and uncertain. That is to say, more akin to the 'fuzzy' generalizations associated with Bassey (1999) than to the cause and effect associations noted by Giddens (1974). I thus argue that multiple methodological approaches should be embraced by



policy makers in order to illuminate the 'why' as well as the 'what'<sup>61</sup> and the limitations of different forms of knowledge well understood. These views are shared by Cooper *et al.* (2009: 3) who note that:

it is virtually impossible for a reasonable person to disagree with the idea that policy and practice should be based on the best available evidence... The critics' real objections are not to the use of evidence itself, but to particular ways in which evidence is being defined or used.

Nonetheless, I admit that policy-makers, whilst now understanding the importance of evidence, may be light years from understanding the frailties of a 'what works' approach, let alone any other implications associated with accepting or embracing interpretivism. Of course, for policy-makers themselves, these concepts may not necessarily need to be couched in such terms. It may simply be enough for them to know that 'cause and effect' quantitative data, by itself, will not explain why something is working; or that to discover 'what works' by simply focusing on evaluating programmes, rather than the nature and quality of the social relationships that underlie them, will not show why a given programme may be replicable. It is therefore suggested that epistemology in complex terms needs only to be understood by the researchers working with or alongside policy-makers. Policy-makers, themselves, simply need to be aware of the nature, strengths and weaknesses of different research approaches and the data they provide<sup>62</sup>.

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<sup>61</sup> It is also the case that different 'types' of approach can be more or less effectively operationalised at different 'levels' of policy making. For instance Slavin (2002: 8) suggests that "the experiment is the design of choice" for studies that seek to make classroom based evaluations based on the efficacy of one particular programme (for example, to improve reading or writing skills). Slavin acknowledges however that for policy making at a more macro level, for example, to implement 'Sure Start' or 'extended services', that randomised controlled tests do not provide an appropriate epistemological basis for decision-making.

<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that, after interviewing a number of policy-makers about the subject of evidence-informed policy making, Campbell *et al.* (2007) found that, as a general theme, there is an overall need for policy-makers to better understand the merits of different research approaches. Thus it is argued that it is the role of researchers both within and outside of government to demonstrate to policy-makers the worth and merit of a broad range of methods for generating evidence, and what that evidence can feasibly be used to explain or demonstrate. Simultaneously, government Departments need to construct the infrastructure to ensure that policy-makers are both willing and equipped to take into consideration evidence of all types (Banks, 2009).

## **Appendix B: An analysis of Foucault's conceptualisations of knowledge and power**

Foucault (1980) argues that there is a need to critically examine the workings of organisations and institutions which appear, on the surface, to be neutral or independent. The purpose of such examinations should seek to reveal the underlying “political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them” (Rabinow, 1984: 6). In other words, the examinations proposed by Foucault should account for the inequalities in power relations promoted and maintained by organisations of relevance and to analyse and understand the effects of these inequalities. As a result, such critical examinations should be used to facilitate struggles against existing, dominant, power relations.

Foucault views the appropriation and dissemination of knowledge as forming part and parcel of these struggles, with his concept of the ‘will to knowledge’ being both a tool to maintain and to combat the power relations in play at any one time. Consequently, Foucault contends that knowledge and power are inextricably linked. Key to Foucault’s analysis is how knowledge might be disseminated: this affects how power is enforced or maintained and how it is undermined. It is suggested by Foucault that this role is played by discourse; for example, it is noted by Foucault (1980) that: “the question of power means basically to ask whom does discourse serve” (cited in Rabinow, 1984: 57). Foucault also envisages discourses as acting to constrain perceptions (Mills, 2003). As part of his analysis Foucault identifies and specifies a myriad of examples of how discourse might be used as part of the ‘will to knowledge’. For instance, in terms of maintaining power, Foucault (1980) argues that each society has a ‘regime of truth’: discursive types which are not only accepted as true, but which are also made to function as true (e.g. via affording status to those charged with pronouncing the truth). In such cases, the dissemination of discourse facilitates control over what those in power wish to promote as the truth: power in such cases is, therefore, synonymous with the promotion of the ‘true’ knowledge of the status quo and the discourse that results is specifically designed to uphold the current, specific ‘regime of truth’.

Foucault (1978: 100-101) also notes, however, that:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power... discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

Discourses formed as part of the appropriation of knowledge can also be used, therefore, to seek to undermine existing power relations through the promotion of alternative 'truth regimes'. As a result, Mills (2003) notes that the concept of exclusion is also key to Foucault's thinking about discourse. In *The order of discourse* (Foucault, 1984) it is argued that discourses should be thought of as sets of practices, each serving to promote given ideologies, whilst also working to remove others from general circulation.

In addition to discourse more generally Foucault (1980) argues that, in terms of literary discourses, identification and evaluation are intimately linked to the reputation of the author. Authors perceived as higher in prestige are afforded more power, but power is also afforded to authors who are privileged. In the case of this thesis, a key *contextualising* factor in the formation of figure iii relates to just this; that is, whether the researcher has the ability to easily access and disseminate knowledge to policy-makers (see section 3.3.2; p. 69). Privilege (according to Foucault's analysis) thus corresponds to policy-makers awarding power to certain identified individuals and so differentiating them from researchers as a whole. I suggest that it is also possible to expand Foucault's argument to include the reputation of the topic at hand. In this case power is also afforded to socially robust knowledge and ideas, whilst such ideas are more able to reach the attentions of policy-makers.

The formation and the nature of the *contextualising* factors that provide the axes for figure iii, is thus one manifestation of the existence of inequalities between researchers and policy-makers in terms of the adoption of knowledge. However, inequalities in power relations would also appear to manifest themselves in other key ways: for example, through the creation of the policy 'agora' which serves to frame the subject and nature of the research which policy-makers are likely to attend to, or through policy-makers' promotion of the 'deficit' model of research. These manifestations are explored more fully in section 8.1 (p. 184).

Foucault's conceptualisations of knowledge and power have directly led to a number of methods and approaches which aim to uncover how discourse moves to shape or create reality and which are also utilised in part within this thesis. For example, Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA) which, Fairclough (1995) argues, was conceptualised to analyse how everyday or common sense understandings, that are ideological in nature, are 'naturalized' or taken for granted (i.e. made normal). The power to control discourse and discursive events or practices is therefore regarded by Fairclough as the ability to continually employ any given discourse and its associated ideological investments over alternatives. Critical Policy Sociology (Gale 2001; Ball, 2007; 2008), meanwhile, attends to the discourse of policy in order to assess how it privileges or excludes topics and ideas; making some seem commonsensical and suggesting others can only offer impossible alternatives (Fairclough, 2000).

## **Appendix C: Definitions of research, knowledge and evidence and evidence types**

### **C.1 – Definitions of research, knowledge and evidence**

As outlined in section 2.5 (p. 28), Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) use the concept of 'Mode 2' to highlight changing trends in the production of knowledge. In particular to suggest a shift from the traditional academic disciplinary based modes of production, where uses are made of knowledge which is transferred once it has been produced ('Mode 1'), to one where knowledge is generated in a context of application. That is to say Gibbons *et al.* (1994) and Nowotny *et al.* (2003) argue that 'Mode 2' knowledge is designed to be applied to particular problems, right from the beginning of the research process.

Moving beyond this conceptualisation of what knowledge is, or comprises, highlights a conspicuous lack of clarity between definitions of knowledge and the notions of research or evidence. Nutley *et al.* (2007: 25), for example, argue that: "definitions of... research, evidence and knowledge invariably invoke implied accounts of at least one other". Evidence has been defined by Gough (2007) as knowledge which addresses a specific issue or question; correspondingly, Gough argues that the term 'weight of evidence' represents the extent to which this can occur. As has been illustrated above, 'Mode 2' knowledge is undertaken within a context of application (Gibbons and Bjarnason, 2005) and so relates to specific questions or issues. I argue, therefore, that the concept of 'Mode 2' knowledge should be regarded as synonymous with that of evidence since they are both concerned with solving or addressing an specific issue or problem.

Cabinet Office (1999a: 43) state that "the raw ingredient of evidence is information... high quality information derived from a variety of sources". Cabinet Office subsequently note that such sources comprise, amongst others; knowledge and research. Nutley *et al.* (2007) contend that the term 'research' describes a production process, and that the users of research attempt to actively and interactively, through dialogue and engagement, interpret research findings as knowledge or evidence. Marston and Watts (2003) too suggest that knowledge may be defined as research that has been interpreted. The findings from academic research once re-contextualised, thus provide a form of knowledge.

As a result, the terms 'research' (or, more specifically, 'research findings'), 'evidence' and 'Mode 2' knowledge seem to encompass the spectrum of what it is that educational policy-makers might consider in the creation of (research-based) 'evidence' informed-policy. These concepts thus form my terms of reference for this thesis and, as such, I have collectively defined them as "data that has been gathered via a process of research, which has been interpreted and which subsequently has or could be used to address a particular policy issue"; they are, as a result, used interchangeably throughout the study. This definition is consistent with the definition of 'evidence' postulated by Davies *et al.*, (2000: 3): "evidence takes the form of 'research', broadly defined. That is, evidence comprises the results of 'systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge'". By using the term 'interpreted', however, I specifically mean that which is presented is not simply the raw data produced by the research process, but the significance ascribed to the data by the researcher. Interpretation may thus range in scope from conclusions to implications to recommendations depending upon the researcher and their intentions as to how the evidence might be used. Because evidence is a product of both data collection and interpretation and because I am viewing evidence in the context of policy making, the notions of quality, usability and the relevance of evidence are also all material to my definition and to the subsequent use or adoption of evidence to policy-makers. These are explored in section 3.1 (p. 44).

## **C.2 – Evidence types**

It is also useful to consider the myriad of evidence types considered by policy-makers. Nacon (2009: 85) notes, for instance, that such evidence may be viewed as "multifaceted, with more formal academic research sitting alongside a range of other information sources". Locke (2009) too argues that policy-makers will adopt a broad interpretation of evidence. Davies (2004) specifies the following as types of evidence likely to form part of the overall spectrum of knowledge taken into account when policy is developed:

- i. Single research studies: Davies (2004) notes that single studies are more commonly used than systematic reviews in supporting the development of policy

- ii. Systematic reviews of research findings: evidence that has been systematically searched, appraised, analysed and summarised according to explicit and transparent criteria
- iii. Pilot studies and case studies: Cabinet Office (2003) recommended that full-scale introductions of new policies should, wherever possible, be preceded by pilot studies. Case studies are also often used to provide an illustration of how individual organisations are engaging with a specific policy or way of working
- iv. Expert's evidence: Davies (2004) suggests that expert opinion is commonly sought and utilised in policy development; typically, such evidence is obtained via groups of expert advisors or through seeking the views of special advisers
- v. Information retrieved via internet searches

It should be noted, however, that these last two evidence types would not fit into the definition of 'research'/'research findings', 'evidence' and 'Mode 2' knowledge (set out above) unless based on a prior process of research. Taking 'expert's evidence', for example, if the expert in question was basing their expert advice on their experience as a practitioner, for the purposes of this study, such evidence would be out of scope for what I am considering within this thesis; what would be included is if their advice were derived from a particular study he/she had conducted and then interpreted. Likewise, I would only count information from the internet as 'research'/'research findings', 'evidence' or 'Mode 2' knowledge if it was based on a particular research study and interpreted before being uploaded to the web.

Campbell *et al.* (2007) also suggest the following evidence types, which can be added to the types postulated by Davies (2004):

- vi. Quantitative/statistical evidence: which may include a number of the types of evidence detailed above
- vii. Economic or scientific evidence
- viii. Surveys, attitudinal and behavioural evidence: which might be utilised as part of the evidence types detailed above
- ix. Qualitative evidence: which may be derived from a number of the types of evidence detailed above
- x. Anecdotal evidence: which could, for example, comprise a single incident, brought to the attention of a policy-maker

- xi. International evidence: Halpin and Troyna (1995) and Perry *et al.*, (2010) both suggest, for example, that there is an important symbolic role attached to the concept of borrowing policy from successful, 'foreign' systems
- xii. Social experiments/controlled trials: to provide the impact of policy interventions
- xiii. Consultations: these may be regarded as broad engagement with stakeholders, customers, clients and citizens

Pawson (2003) notes that, in addition, evidence may be derived from 'action research' (undertaken primarily by practitioners with a view to affecting practice), 'emancipatory' and/or user led' approaches (research carried out by those who are viewed as objects of oppression). It is also suggested (Brown, 2009; Locke, 2009) that evidence types comprise individual or thematic reports from inspecting, auditing or regulating bodies; for example, Ofsted reports. Finally, as well as evidence grounded in data, theory generating work and 'think pieces' (or other similar commentaries produced by think tanks) can also be seen to sit within this broad spectrum. Again, for the purposes of this study, many of these 'evidence types' are excluded from what I specifically consider to be 'research', 'evidence' or 'Mode 2' knowledge. Nonetheless it is clear that academic research forms just one part of the many sources of 'evidence' that are typically considered during the policy development process.

Davies (2004) contends, that each evidence type come with its own pros and cons. It is felt to be beyond the scope of this thesis to dwell further on these. I will, however, reiterate the statement that I made in Appendix A (p. 223): when adopting evidence, policy-makers need to be aware of the nature, strengths and weaknesses of different evidence types and what they may or may not be appropriately used for, something Rickinson *et al.*, (2011) argue, is currently lacking.



## **Appendix D: Modes of conceptualising policy development**

I use this Appendix to consider the various ways in which the policy development process has been envisaged. I begin by considering the bureaucratic hierarchy within which policy making/policy delivery organisations are situated. I then illustrate the 'stages' that nascent policies are perceived to typically travel through before becoming fully fledged. I finish by touching upon models of policy development that account for the process in ways considered to be non-linear or 'messy'. I begin by presenting previous work undertaken by myself.

I suggest in Brown (2009) that one way to conceptualise policy development is to see it occurring at the level of the micro, meso and macro. Government delivery agencies, who receive an annual mandate from the Department for Education that sets out the initiatives they are required to undertake, represents policy making that occurs at a micro level. This is because such agencies have limited scope to engage in the development of new policy. The Department for Education, in developing policy ideas from a preconceived kernel, so that they are ready for delivery/roll-out, therefore represents a meso layer, while the macro outer shell comprises the originators and generators of new policy initiatives at a national level. In the case of education, such macro policy actors might include ministers and their advisors, possibly developing policies in combination with more exogenous policy actors or driving forces such as those from the Prime Minister's Office or Her Majesty's Treasury.<sup>63</sup> Since I conclude (in Brown, 2009) that micro level policy-makers and researchers within government are only likely to engage with research that fits within the general requirements of their remit letter, it would seem logical for academic researchers to target new research findings solely at those policy-makers and government researchers operating at the meso or macro levels, where such evidence might be successful in generating new ideas. Thus, whilst evidence-informed policy making is always likely to be limited at the level of the micro, it is suggested there is scope to examine, as the title of this thesis suggests, those factors which influence the adoption of evidence by educational policy-makers at the levels of the meso and macro.

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<sup>63</sup> Trowler's (2003: 99) case study of policy making in Grant Maintained (GM) schools provides an excellent example of macro and meso level policy making in action. In the case study, Trowler describes how the idea of GM status originated from Kenneth Baker (then Secretary of State for Education) who presented his civil servants with a mere "germ of an idea". Officials then had to work up and guide this initial thought into a policy proposal to be implemented.

Both Eurydice Network (2004) and Oxman *et al.* (2009a) note that policy making, as a process, may be conceived as comprising three stages: initiation and development - this includes defining rationales, setting clear objectives and an appraisal of the options; implementation – identifying the levers for introducing policy, those responsible for delivering the policy and how the process of implementation will be undertaken, and; maintenance and evaluation - how the policy will be monitored. Eurydice Network (2004) also suggest that policies can be initiated in a number of ways, including: manifesto commitments, ministerial priorities, the identification of a problem, public agenda, policy directorate initiatives, EU Directives, findings arising from commissioned reports and judicial decisions, with ministers working with their advisors and policy directorates to develop initial ideas and submissions.

It should be noted, however, that within the frameworks postulated by myself in Brown (2009) and Eurydice Network (2004), policy development may occur in messy and non-linear ways. Stronach and MacLure (1997), for example, use the concepts of ‘time’, ‘space’, ‘risk’ and ‘uncertainty’ to demonstrate the myriad of complex processes that affect the way policy is developed. Weiss (1982: 626) too suggests that “policies, even policies of fateful magnitude, often take shape through jumbled and diffuse processes that differ in vital ways from the conventional imagery”. Ball (2008) argues that education policy development has been subsumed within a more generic approach to public sector reform, which employs additive or incremental ‘technologies’ that slowly establishes ideas in small steps over time along with changes in related policy discourses so that such ideas seem obvious or even necessary. More radical critiques of such ‘linear’ models of policy making also include the ‘garbage can’ model (Cohen *et al.*, 1972; March and Olsen, 1976), which presents policy making as a totally ‘irrational’ or non-linear process. Here, for instance, solutions to problems may already exist and lie dormant waiting to be attached to emerging policy issues, with solutions and problems being joined as a result of being thrown into the ‘garbage can’ mix of the policy making process.

## **Appendix E: A case study of how research has successfully influenced policy**

The *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 longitudinal study (EPPE)* ran from 1996 – 2008 and was funded by the DfES to provide answers to policy questions about early childhood education and care. At the time of its commission, a primary challenge for policy was perceived to be the need to transform services available for 0-5 year old children so that they were provided in a more coherent and joined up way. *EPPE*, in response, was designed to look at three key issues: i) the cognitive and behavioural effects of different types and forms of pre-school education; ii) the characteristics of, and processes utilised in, the most effective pre-schools, and; iii) the identification of the interactions between pre-school and a child's family's characteristics. Overall, the findings from the *EPPE* study suggest that the quality of early years provision, the length within which children are enrolled in early years education and the effectiveness of the setting attended, all make an important and long lasting contribution to children's progress and attainment.

It is argued by Taggart *et al.* that the findings briefly outlined above significantly contributed to the evidence base for subsequent policy decisions on pre-school education. Taggart *et al.* (2008: 12) go on to suggest that “*EPPE's 'significant impact on policy development' is best considered through the published documents that refer to its influence and the importance of the research findings*” (my italics). For example, in the government publication *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare* (HMT, 2004: 65), it is clearly stated that “the main source of analysis of the impact of pre-school provision on child development in the UK is the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project*” (my italics). Furthermore, in providing the policy rationale for the benefits of early education, *Choice for parents* cites *EPPE* numerous times as providing key evidence with regards a myriad of policy issues. In addition, *EPPE* is also referred to in the 2003 document, *Every Child Matters*, the 2004 children's act (particularly with regards to extended services) and also in the 2007 paper *Policy Review of Children and Young People*.

The resulting policy expansion following the adoption of the *EPPE* findings was significant. For example, *Choice for parents* suggests that, at the time of its writing: “525,000 additional childcare places have been created benefiting 1.1million children” (HMT, 2004: 22), that “1,279 Neighbourhood Nurseries have been opened” (HMT, 2004: 26). In addition, *Choice for parents* notes that a £125 million Transformation

Fund was set in place to improve the quality of, and training afforded to, the early years workforce. Such examples lead Taggart *et al.* to conclude that *EPPE* has indeed contributed to policy development even if, as they hypothesise, this was because such research was “pushing on an open door” (2008: 17) or, in other words, because the *EPPE* study had been commissioned by policy-makers to provide answers to problems that they actively faced and did so at a time when the appetite was there to not only take on board those findings, but also to act upon them.

In a paper by Sylva *et al.* (2007), it is also suggested that various modes or types of communication between researchers and policy-makers featured strongly within *EPPE*. For instance: Sylva *et al.* suggest that there were clear and open lines of communication between policy-makers and researchers; regular face-to-face meetings provided access and the opportunity for discussion; the key government researcher was used as a main communication channel to policy-makers; the *EPPE* team tailored their communications depending on whether they were disseminating findings to academic or policy minded audiences, and; the key government researcher also helped ensure communication to other stakeholders was ‘crystal clear’. The *EPPE* study thus also provides an illustration of the importance of effective research communication and an example of its role in ensuring that knowledge is successfully adopted (and even used).

## **Appendix F: An example of Social Activity Method**

Dowling has used Social Activity Method (SAM) to analyse a number of empirical settings. The example below is derived from Dowling (2007), where it is suggested that the original deployment of SAM was his 1993 analysis of the SMP (a UK School Mathematics textbook scheme). Here Dowling claims that the application of SAM to the empirical revealed how student audiences for the SMP books were explicitly differentiated according to ability. Through the employment of semiotic analysis, however, Dowling found that pupils were, in addition, also differentiated according to their social class.

In this specific example, Dowling approached the empirical by examining:

- The extent to which strategies are put in place within discourse to explicitly establish principles of practice. This is referred to as discursive saturation (DS+ indicates that principles of practice are explicit, DS- indicates that they are not). For example, research methods are likely to be considered as DS+ (since key terms and procedures are well defined), whereas the evaluation of academic writing is likely to be considered as DS- (since there is no explicit definition of what constitutes a good academic argument).
- The level of institutionalization, defined as “the extent to which a practice exhibits an empirical regularity that marks it out as recognizably distinct from other practices” (Dowling, 2005: 13). In the example below, institutionalization refers to whether principles of practice are publically or privately established.

These two criteria combined provide the following matrix with its four ideal types:

**Figure vii: Matrix of ideal types**

	I+	I-
DS+	Discourse	Idiolect
DS-	Skill	Trick
	Competence	Performance

which can be described in more detail in the following way:

**Figure viii: Matrix of ideal types further explained**

	I+	I-
DS+	Formally instructing pupils on how something should be done	Discussing with pupils how to successfully perform in a given, everyday situation
DS-	Apprenticing or the passing on of formal skills	Demonstrating to pupils how to successfully perform in a given, everyday situation
	<b>Teaching maths for maths sake</b>	<b>Maths to cope with the everyday world</b>

Dowling's SMP example also required his resulting matrix to be further categorised into the notions of competence and performance. Here 'competence' refers to Dowling's concept of the esoteric domain, or the notion of teaching maths for maths sake; while 'performance' relates to his concept of public domain: the teaching of maths to cope with the everyday world. Dowling uses the matrix to suggest that high ability students are ones that are privileged access to the esoteric domain; that is, are taught maths in a way that will allow them to then learn maths at 'A' level and then at degree level, whereas text books aimed at low ability students tend to re-package 'tricks' as 'skills'. In other words, to recontextualise teaching so that it relates to everyday practice, or dressing up content so that it appears as a necessary condition for participation in society. For example, you have a budget and the price of various goods, how much can you afford to buy?

## **Appendix G: Dowling's critique of Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing**

I use this Appendix to set out Dowling's primary critique of Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing. Dowling suggests (2005) that this initial engagement with, or the 'misreading' of Bernstein's work, in part, led to the development of his own approach; Social Activity Method.

It is argued by Dowling (2005, 2007, 2008) that Bernstein's approach is structuralist in nature: that is, Bernstein's work posits the world as a system comprising elements which provide meaning, but that are fixed in their relative positions. As a result the nature of Bernsteinian analysis is also 'fixed' and, as such, Dowling claims that Bernstein's theories do not always display coherence when they encounter the empirical domain; or, as Dowling suggests, Bernstein, on occasion, offered "quasi-empirical illustrations to bolster his theoretical apparatus" (2005: 15). This becomes problematic, Dowling contends, when exploring concepts such as 'classification' or 'framing'.

Dowling (2005) asserts that in Bernstein's own work, classification and framing directly relate to (and carry within them) Bernstein's notions of 'power' and 'control', respectively; Bernstein's (1996: 19) definition of which are as follows:

...control establishes legitimate communications, and power establishes legitimate relations between categories. Thus, power constructs relations between, and controls relations within forms of interaction.

In addition to their association with power and control, Dowling goes on to suggest that classification and framing may also be associated with other "opposing sets of terms" (2005: 9) such as 'space' (classification) and 'time' (framing). However, since framing links to control, it can therefore be defined as being "about who controls what" (ibid). With respect to the aforementioned term, 'time', within a classroom this could relate to both the idea of 'pacing' (i.e. how fast learners are expected to learn) and possibly even 'sequencing' (i.e. when, or the order in which things should be learnt). Strong framing would therefore mean that the teacher or knowledge 'transmitter' has control over how fast their pupils are expected to learn and when (or in what order). Where framing is described as weak, the pupil or 'acquirer' of knowledge displays more

control over pacing and sequencing and determines the speed of their own knowledge acquisition.

Classification, when related to a school's curriculum, can be defined as being the level of specialisation, distinction or insulation between one subject and another: for example, the distinction between physics and French (outside of education, classification could refer to the distinction between any one thing, item, object, system etc. and another; for instance, the distinction between capitalism and communism). Within a curriculum, strong classification indicates a high level of specialism or distinction between subjects, weak classification indicates that a more integrated approach to the curriculum is being taken.

Dowling (2005) suggests that, in his own work, he makes much more use of the term classification, which he calls 'institutionalisation', than he does of framing. This is because he claims that the notions of power and control and correspondingly, therefore, the notions of classification and framing, operate at different levels of analysis. Taking a highly specialised school curriculum as an example (i.e. where French is clearly distinguished from physics as a subject), the positions of power and control and their relationship with the concepts of classification and framing could almost be regarded as interchangeable. This is a consequence of the idea that it is specialisation that distinguishes between subjects such as physics and French and (as Dowling contends) specialisation tends to take place within something. Thus a highly specialised curriculum with clear distinction between its subjects is one that is as strongly framed as it is strongly classified. Strong framing in this case suggests that specialization within a curriculum is caused by the control over individual subjects within a curriculum being held by individual teachers or faculties. This seems to relate framing to power (recalling Bernstein's definition of power as something that "constructs relations between" subjects; 1996: 19). Strong classification in a curriculum (i.e. the thing that 'insulates' one subject from another), Dowling claims, tends to be caused by types of text or symbols used in one subject as opposed to any other. This could very easily be related to control, which according to Bernstein "establishes legitimate communications" (ibid).

Dowling (2005) goes on to argue that, because these concepts can operate at different levels rather than sit within a hierarchical structure, the strength of framing and classification need to coincide. In other words, if subjects are highly specialised and distinct from one another, in order for this situation to be maintained, specific practices



within the subject: how the subject is taught, how it is evaluated, control over what is taught and when, all require that both framing and classification remain strong (while the converse applies for a more 'integrated' curricula). In the absence of empirical material to the contrary, Dowling maintains that this interconnectivity between framing and classification, and thus between power and control, renders at least three of the four concepts of framing, classification, power and control obsolete. Dowling instead puts forward the argument for simply keeping classification, which he renames 'institutionalisation' and which he defines as: "the extent to which a practice exhibits an empirical regularity that marks it out as recognisably distinct from other practices" (2005: 13).

Dowling's approach is consistent, to an extent, with Bernstein's own macro concept of 'codes'. For example, Bernstein argues that codes are: "regulators of the relationships between contexts and through those relationships, regulators of concepts within contexts" (1990: 101) which seems to link both power and control together. However Dowling's approach seems to be far less structuralist since, like Bourdieu, his work seems to be open to the notion of strategies over rules; rules being described by Bourdieu (1990: 103) as the "obstacle *par excellence* to the construction of an adequate theory of practice" to describe social practices. For example when he discusses the "transmission or attempted transmission of... specialised practices", he suggests that the "transmitter must constitute a discourse that is accessible to the acquirer" (2005: 13).

## **Appendix H: An explanation of how the two main models developed for this thesis (figures ii and iii) relate to one another**

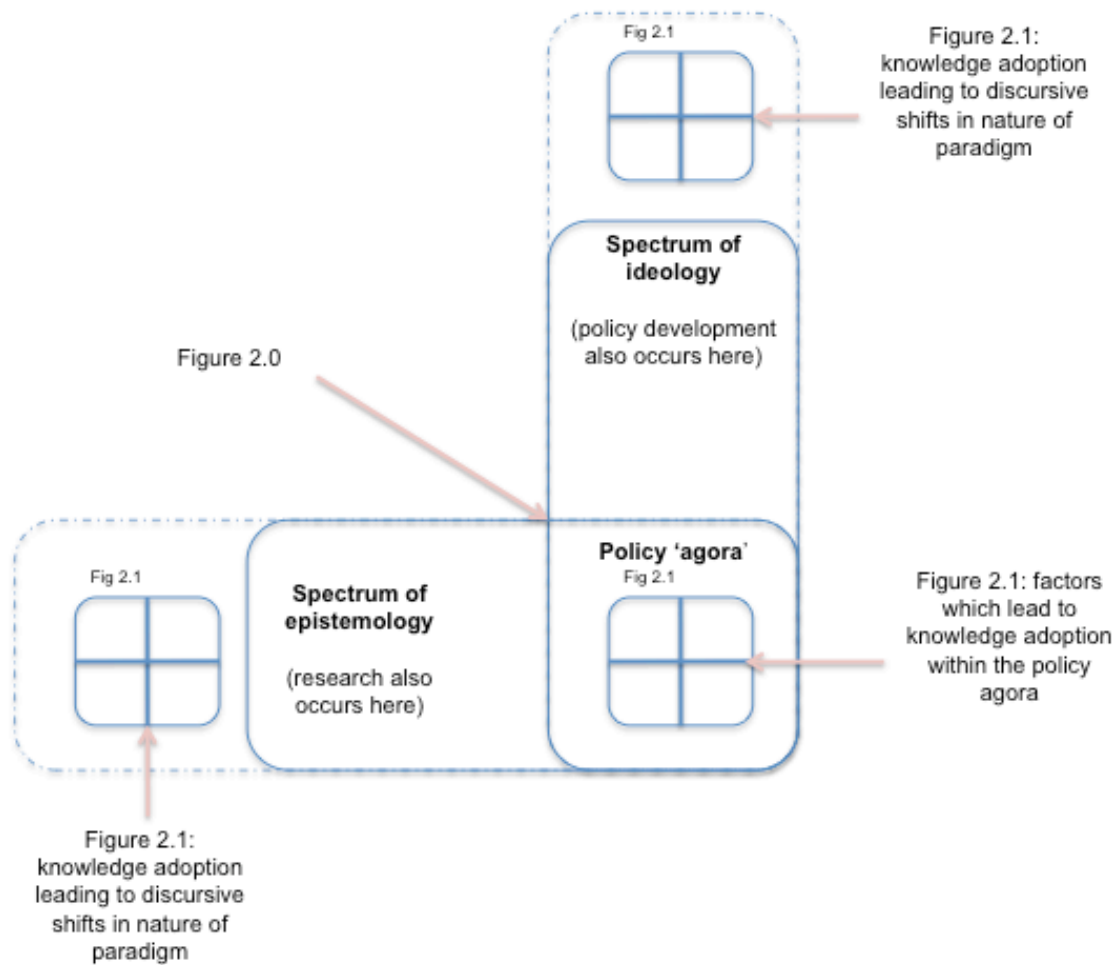
As has been illustrated in the literature review, figure ii represents the argument that a necessary pre-condition for the actualisation evidence-based policy is a conjoining of the dominant ideological and epistemological paradigms. It is suggested that such a conjoin results in the materialisation of policy ‘agoras’ (Gibbons, 1999; Nowotny *et al.*, 2003) which contain the gamut of research policy-makers are likely to consider. I contend that, as a result, evidence-informed policy will only occur within the conceptual space set out by the policy agora.

The actualisation of evidence-informed policy still requires, however, the successful adoption of knowledge by policy-makers. This is accounted for by figure iii, which represents my argument that knowledge adoption is dependant upon factors considered to be *internal*, *external* and *contextualising*, with the adoption of Social Activity Method as a theoretical framework. The factors outlined in figure iii may be seen, therefore, as those which affect or lead to knowledge adoption within the policy agora set out in figure ii.

It is argued that discursive dominance is likely to result in the normalization of a given ideological or epistemological position and so the nature of a given policy agora (as represented in figure ii). As such, a policy agora is likely to remain fixed in place until a shift occurs in the paradigms defining it. One factor that could potentially lead to such a shift is the accumulation of a socially robust corpus of knowledge. Alternatively, a new government will also bring with it new philosophies or beliefs. In either situation, it is the factors outlined in figure iii that are likely to affect or lead to either an accumulation, or to the adoption of knowledge by politicians currently outside of government and so outside of the current policy agora.

One proposed relationship between figures ii and iii is set out in Figure H.i, below. As can be seen it is figure ii, which provides the wider context for the study. Figure iii can therefore appear many times, both within and outside of the policy agora/figure ii. In this way it represents the actions undertaken by social actors when either looking to influence policy or when looking to influence the wider ideological or epistemological environment.

**Figure ix: How Figures ii and iii relate.**



A second of conceptualisation of the relationship between figures ii and iii, based on the empirical findings constructed as part of this study, is represented as figure iv (see sub-section 5.2.6, p. 132). Here I present figure iii three dimensionally; this illustrates that knowledge suppliers will not only have to account for the social robustness of the idea to which their work pertains and whether they are privileged, but are also required to identify those individuals or groups who might regard their work as politically compatible.

## **Appendix I: The case study and my methodological approach**

Cranmer (2007) suggests that there is disagreement amongst educational researchers as to both the definition and the position of the case study as a distinct and coherent methodology. This may, in part, be due to the mixed theoretical heritage of the case study approach (having antecedents in disciplines as far reaching as medicine, anthropology and law). Cranmer continues, however, by arguing that consensus has broadly been reached that case studies will involve an actual empirical setting and seek to understand and capture and therefore preserve, the relationships between the setting and the phenomenon under review. Adelman *et al.* (1980) suggest that the advantages to undertaking case studies include: the level of detail afforded to the case - ensuring that all nuances, subtleties and complexities are captured and preserved, that because of this preservation of detail the end product may be continually re-examined to gain insights from alternative points of view and that the case study presents data in a way that is more publically accessible than other forms of research.

Cohen *et al.* (2007) describe the case study approach as one that is used to understand an individual unit, be that a person, an organization or a community. In this way it is argued that the social actors involved within the meso and macro level policy making community in England (i.e. the universe for this thesis), could legitimately be considered a case. In addition, the settings for the study (government departments and the knowledge providers that feed into them) can be considered 'real-life' and the issue or phenomenon of evidence communication is interwoven with the general complexities and day-to-day workings of the setting. This is consistent with Yin's (1994: 13) argument that case study research should involve:

... an empirical enquiry that investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Limitations to the case study approach centre on the perceived difficulties of generalizing from one or few cases to a wider population (Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Bassey, 1999, 2001; Cranmer, 2007): case study research does not necessarily or automatically lead to generalization in the same way that a survey or a more statistical approach might. This is illustrated, for example, by Adelman *et al.* (1980) who characterize the results of a case study as 'interpretive products', which can only ever form the basis of further investigation, while Stenhouse (1985) suggests that

generalizations from case studies will always be a matter of judgement not calculation. Hence, Stenhouse concludes, case studies limit the author to producing a report of experience, which offers evidence and invites judgement.

In spite of these critiques, a number of authors have argued that the ability to infer rather than generalize is good enough, or that generalization can even occur through non statistical means. Stake, for example, maintains that (1995: 86): “‘naturalistic generalization’ can be made through vicarious experience [if it is] so well constructed that the person feels that it happened to themselves”. Punch (2005) contends that case studies aid generalization by providing propositions or concepts that can be tested in further research. Bassey (1999; 2001), on the other hand, talks about the idea of ‘fuzzy’ generalizations, that is those which have more tentative uncertain elements within them. Here surveys, for example, would be seen by Bassey as less fuzzy and more clear cut, whereas the generalizations afforded to case studies would be seen as less concrete.

It is my argument, however, that any attempt to develop a case study of those research producers operating within the education sector in England, should be regarded as an undertaking into what Stake (1995) refers to as an ‘intrinsic’ case. In other words, studying a given and defined empirical setting for the sake of understanding only how that system works and not because it will necessarily shed light on any other empirical area. This argument is lent weight by Davies *et al.* (2000) who in their book, *What works: Evidence-informed policy and practice in public services*, divide the work of government into its constituent parts. In doing so, they suggest that what might drive evidence-informed policy in one key area (for example, justice) is only likely to be of passing relevance in another (such as health). This is because, they contend, contextual or epistemological factors, or issues such as the historic use of research are all likely to be fundamentally different. The identification of ‘what works’ across such sectors can, therefore, only ever be developed on a super macro level with only a superficial level of detail provided for each individual sector.

It was originally envisaged, therefore, that my thesis would represent a (intrinsic) case study of the social actors involved within the meso and macro level policy making community in England. However, as can be seen in chapter 4 (p. 89), the predominant method of data collection is that of the semi-structured, in-depth interview; whilst rhetorical analysis and participant observation do play roles in the process of collecting data, these are relatively minor in comparison. This reliance on one form of collecting

data therefore limits my ability to provide triangulation; a key part of the construction and verification of any case (Yin, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Dowling (2008b: 73) argues that general methodological approaches such as surveys, case studies, ethnographies etc. “suggest certain regularities of method and/ or interpretation, without necessarily constituting substantive theories about particular regions of the empirical field”. This implies that by employing a framework which structures how you engage with the empirical the researcher has adopted a specific approach. In the case of this thesis, therefore, it can be argued that, in addition to employing Social Activity Method (SAM) as a theoretical framework, because SAM directs researchers to interact and interpret empirical data in a particular way, that it also represents a general approach (a notion which is confirmed by Dowling, 2008b). Thus, with this thesis, I am undertaking a qualitative study which has been shaped by the Dowling’s theoretical and analytical requirements.

## **Appendix J: The interview questionnaire used during the fieldwork process**

### **Interview questionnaire**

#### **Broad outline of the project**

My thesis is concerned with the concept of evidence informed policy. In particular, that the development of evidence informed policies seem to depend both on how research is communicated to policy-makers, and how policy-makers act as audiences for such information. The aim of this interview is therefore to examine:

- what you regard as the main issues associated with the adoption of knowledge by policy-makers, and;
- whether or how such issues might be overcome.

#### **Ethical considerations**

- Detail on the fieldwork and interview process
- Confidentiality/anonymity
- Right to withdraw from the research process at any time
- Ask about use of the digital recorder

#### **Opening questions**

- i. Before we begin, could you just give me an outline of what your [role as/role in...] entails on a day to day basis [all]?
- ii. To what extent do you undertake commissioned research for government [academics researchers only]? Why?
- iii. What role does research does in your day to day job [policy-makers only]?
- iv. Could you describe the relationship between yourselves, policy-makers and academic or other researchers [government researchers only]?

### Questions for Academic Researchers

- i. What factors do you feel typically impact on whether policy-makers read or engage with the findings of research?

Prompts:

- Effective use of title or other coding and signalling techniques
- The subject area/existence of other research on this subject
- Perceived challenge to or support of current policies
- Whether it addresses a current problem or issue they need to consider
- The type of method used
- Perceived credibility of the source [what factors affect this?]
- Perceived quality of the evidence [what factors affect this?]
- Any attempts to engage policy makers in the project during its earlier stages
- The accessibility of the message
- Clarity of presentation
- The media type used
- Whether the message has been tailored to policy makers' particular needs or interests

Do you have any examples?

- ii. How do you discover which subjects or areas matter to policy-makers? How could this process be improved?
- iii. In your experience, how do policy-makers typically react to research that challenges current policies or policy paradigms, for example; the nature of testing, the primary curriculum etc.? Why?

Probes:

- Does this change if the research is government commissioned or externally produced?
- Probe around notion of the policy agora



- iv. What methods do you use in attempting to communicate the findings of your research to policy-makers, i.e. how do you try and engage policy-makers with your work? What have you found to be successful? Why? What frustrates your efforts? Why?

Probe:

- Processes of user engagement
- Efficacy of different media types
- Engagement with different levels of the 'policy food chain'

Do you have any examples?

- v. Do you feel that policy-makers have difficulties in digesting a typically academic discursive style? Why? How feasible/practical/desirable might it be to simplify the language used when presenting the findings of research? How else might research findings be made accessible without diluting the key messages of given studies?

- vi. Are there any issues or problems with presenting findings in a way that details 'what works' or that suggests some kind of cause and effect? If so, what should the dialogic be between research and policy?

Probe:

- Issues associated with what research can tell us
- Issues associated with generalization, validity, reliability
- Issues associated with the complex nature of the social world

- vii. What level of detail should be presented to policy-makers? Are there issues associated with simplifying research findings

Probe and explain:

- 1:3:25 approach championed by Canadian Health Services Research

### Foundation

- ‘Black Box’ approach associated with *How the world’s best...*

viii. What barriers do you encounter when attempting to engage policy-makers with your work? How might these be overcome? What would happen in an ideal world (in terms of knowledge adoption)?

### Prompts:

- Ease of access to policy-makers
- General engagement with or attitude towards research
- Existence of other, competing, sources of information?

### Questions for Policy-Makers and Government Researchers

- i. Where do you access research from?
- ii. What is likely to make you pick up and read or engage with a particular research project?

Prompts (and prompt for examples):

- Effective use of title or other coding and signalling techniques
- The subject area/existence of other research on this subject
- Perceived challenge to or support of current policies
- Addresses issues or problems of current concern
- The type of method used
- Perceived credibility of the source [what factors affect this?]
- Perceived quality of the evidence [what factors affect this?]
- Any attempts to engage you in the project during its earlier stages
- The accessibility of the message
- Clarity of presentation
- The media type used
- Whether the message has been tailored to your particular needs or interests

- iii. Is the nature of the language/style used by academic researchers problematic in terms of you being able to quickly and easily digest the information presented to you/policy-makers? Why?

- iv. Could you show me a report written in a style you like?

*If no*

What would your/policy-maker's preferred written style be?

Probe:

- Akin to *The Economist* or *New Scientist*

- Akin to Barber and Mourshed's style in *How the world's best...* [if familiar]

Examples of an accessible style? What makes it accessible? What makes you engage with other information sources?

- v. What level of detail do you require from a research report? What should it tell you and why [for government researchers ask whether this alters for policy-makers]?

Probe and explain:

- Actionable findings
- Cause and effect or 'what works'
- Methodology [Barber and Mourshed's 'Black Box' approach]
- 1:3:25 approach championed by Canadian Health Services Research Foundation

- vi. When/how do you engage with both researchers and research? Why?

- vii. What sources of knowledge, other than academic research, do you pay attention to? Why [and how do such sources 'market' themselves]?

Prompt:

- Think tanks
- International bodies such as the OECD
- Individual experts
- Consultations
- Anecdotal evidence from visits etc.
- Individual case studies or examples of policies or behaviour in action

- viii. What role does evidence play in the policy making process? Where does it typically feature? Why?

- ix. What is the culture within the Department for utilizing evidence when developing policy? What other infrastructure is in place to support the

consideration of evidence?

Probes:

- Do Boards/Committees routinely consider evidence?
- Do DfE researchers give regular research presentations
- Role of the DfE's 'bridge' etc.

- x. How does the Department take into account or respond to research that is critical of, or challenges, current policies or policy paradigms, for example; the nature of testing, the primary curriculum etc?

Probes:

- Does this change if the research is government commissioned or externally produced?

- xi. What training or what other facilities exist to enable policy-makers to meaningfully engage with the findings of research studies?

## **Appendix K: The interview consent form**



### **DPhil thesis project consent form**

Chris Brown (University of Sussex) is undertaking a post-graduate research project entitled: 'What factors affect the use of research within educational policy making? How might a better understanding of these factors improve research use and aid the development of policy?'

This consent form relates to the fieldwork stage of the project, which involves interviews with policy-makers, academics and other partners who have a broad interest in, or who have expressed views on, evidence-informed policy-making in education and the factors that help or hinder such a process.

Please indicate your consent to being interviewed and for the anonymised findings to be used as part of the study, by completing the relevant sections below:

- **I am willing to contribute to the post-graduate study detailed above**
- **I understand that reasonable steps will be taken to ensure my confidentiality and anonymity at all times**
- **I understand I will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the transcription of my interview in order to flag up errors or areas of particular sensitivity that may not be quoted verbatim, attributed or possibly even discussed at all**
- **I am aware that I may withdraw my consent at any time**

Name: .....

Date: .....

Contact email address: .....

Contact telephone number: .....

## **Appendix L: Interview case summary sheet**

Name:		Date of interview:
Detail on the participant, including their role, level of responsibility etc		
The main themes or issues raised during the interview		
The research questions the participant bore on most centrally		
Any new hypothesis, speculations, or hunches about the 'field situation' either suggested by the participant or that emerged during or after the interview		
Suggestions for where I should place most energy during the next interview and what kinds of information should be sought		

## **Appendix M: A rhetorical analysis of Barber and Mourshed (2007)**

In this Appendix, I provide a rhetorical analysis of *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*. Written by Professor Sir Michael Barber and Mona Mourshed, *How the world's best...* was published in 2007 by management consultancy, McKinsey and Company. Its aim was to combine qualitative interview data, desk research and quantitative data collected by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in order to provide insight into the factors that have driven performance in the world's top performing education systems (as ranked by PISA). The report concludes that three factors have had the greatest impact on the performance of the highest ranked educational systems: ensuring that the 'right' people become teachers; appropriate professional development to transform those people into effective instructors, and; ensuring that the educational system is appropriately configured to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

### **M.1 – Reasons for undertaking a rhetorical analysis of Barber and Mourshed**

In Brown (2009) I observe that this report was, at its launch, regarded as an outstanding example of how to communicate ideas to policy-makers. This observation stems from a number of statements made by those I interviewed which, in summary, suggest that the physical presentation of Barber and Mourshed's report enabled interviewees quickly and easily to take on board the information presented. For example:

Its much easier to absorb if its in [the McKinsey's] kind of format... the very nicely presented booklet, that type of thing, it was pretty simple... and it was easy to take in, so from that point of view it was great.

Policy-maker (from Brown, 2009)

In terms of accessibility the McKinsey report interested me hugely because of the presentation and the style... there's something quite engaging about the way it's presented... that's set out to make a [report] a bit different.

Policy-maker (from Brown, 2009)



## M.2 – Critique of Barber and Mourshed's report

Debate exists, however, as to whether the report can accurately be described as research, with critics (e.g. Alexander, 2009) focusing on the lack of detail concerning methodology, the fieldwork process and how the data were analysed. These arguments may be illustrated by utilising a definition of research and showing how Barber and Mourshed's efforts compare. For example, in RAE 2008 research was defined in the following way<sup>64</sup>: "[an] original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding". Only limited detail is given on the methodology employed in producing *How the world's best...*, however. The following sentence, for instance, provides the report's sole mention of the study's approach:

The report is an outcome of an analysis of the achievements of the best-performing school systems as defined by [PISA data], a survey of the current literature and interviews with more than one hundred experts, policy-makers and practitioners.  
(2007: preface)

This means that it is difficult to gauge fully the nature of the methods, approaches, sample or the literature Barber and Mourshed utilise and so whether their efforts constitute a rigorous or effective 'investigation'. Likewise, in terms of its analysis, Braun (2008) argues that the conclusions reached by Barber and Mourshed, whilst appealing to commonsense, would be stronger if their operationalisation had been made more explicit: for example, by outlining the extent to which all top performing systems employ all three of the report's impact factors, and whether any jurisdictions had employed Barber and Mourshed's conclusions but without success. Braun (2008: 318) also notes that:

In fact, the report is written in rather an impressionistic style and it is difficult to get a sense of how firm the evidential basis for the conclusions really is.

Since it is impossible to assess the methodological and analytical rigour employed by its authors, the report is regarded as difficult to define or classify: is it an academic study, or a 'think piece' and so, as Haas (2007) notes, not subject to the same level of intellectual scrutiny as academic research? It is also, therefore, difficult to judge

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<sup>64</sup> See: <http://www.rae.ac.uk/Pubs/2005/03/rae0305.doc> (Annex B)

whether the report should be utilised by policy-makers in the formation of policy (what constitutes evidence, and so what should be considered by policy-makers is set out in Appendix C; p. 234). In addition, as a result of this lack of methodological detail it is argued (section 6.1; p. 148) that there is a tension between academics employing the ‘Barber’ approach in order to appeal to policy-makers and the production of more ‘traditional’ outputs, such as those eligible for the RAE exercise.

As well as the report’s lack of explicit methodology, the appropriateness of PISA more generally as a comparative measure of school systems has also been questioned. Gorur (2007) notes that the PISA survey has become one of the most comprehensive large-scale international tests in recent times, gathering what the OECD describes as “an unprecedented comparative knowledge base of school systems and their outcomes” (OECD, 2007: 6). In 2006, 57 countries, accounting for 90 per cent of the world’s economy took part in the survey (OECD, 2007) and, increasingly, nations are using PISA scores as measures of the success of their education systems and their policies and to compare themselves with other countries (Gorur, 2007). This phenomenon has been described by Grek, (2007: 5) as the “PISA effect”. As a consequence poor results can trigger educational reform whilst countries such as Finland, which top the PISA league tables, have become ‘Meccas’ for policy officials and educationists interested in understanding what makes for such consistently high performance (Ball, 2008).

Sjøberg (2007: 6) contends, however, that the OECD is “built on a neo-liberal political and economic ideology”. As such, he claims that PISA should be regarded as being solely concerned with understanding how school systems build the skills or competencies that “promote the economic goals of the OECD” (ibid) rather than any of the other potential or wider aims of education. Likewise Sjøberg argues that PISA promotes just three subjects (reading, maths and science) suggesting that other subjects (foreign languages, the humanities etc.) are less important to meeting a country’s future challenges. It is also important to note that Topping *et al.* (2003) caution that correlation within PISA data does not equate to causation: PISA ranks countries but provides no indication as to why this ranking occurred. They also argue that the methodology employed by PISA may be critiqued since there exists:

Considerable differences between countries in the amount of preschool education, the age of entry to formal schooling, the structure of school systems, the resources given to schools, community resources such as libraries, the

training of teachers, and the general learning culture... [and issues surrounding]... the cultural appropriateness of items. (2003: 4)

In a similar vein Alexander (2009: 7) too questions the implicit assumptions underpinning surveys such as PISA, namely that “the quality and effectiveness of whole schools and entire education systems is reduced to a statistical calculation of gain in output over input”. This approach, Alexander suggests, is problematic because it fails to incorporate other factors known to influence performance, for example: culture, contexts and condition. Alexander (2009: 10) also contends that, in ignoring factors such as local or national culture, comparative studies are reduced to producing the “banalities of McKinsey’s conclusion[s]”.

Questions over the validity of PISA data as a way of effectively and appropriately comparing education systems must also, therefore, lead to questions as to the validity of the drivers identified by Barber and Mourshed in terms of those who perform most effectively. In other words, if the explanatory power of the outputs used by Barber and Mourshed are questionable, then so, perhaps, are the outputs Barber and Mourshed have produced on the basis of these outputs. However, despite critiques of both the report’s rigour and the use of PISA data more generally, because of the positive reaction of policy-makers to the report, I have pursued the rhetorical analysis of *How the world’s best...* that I propose in Brown (2009). This is because such an analysis should lead to an understanding of what led the report to be regarded as an appealing document and so what might be learnt from how it negotiates the *internal* and *external* factors associated with the effective dissemination of knowledge: in other words, such an analysis might potentially reveal key knowledge adoption strategies that could be pursued by academics (and others) looking to influence knowledge debates.

### **M.3 – The analysis framework for rhetorical analysis**

As noted in section 4.8 (p. 107), Leach (2000) provides a comprehensive analytical framework through which to structure rhetorical analyses. In doing so, she argues that only individual elements of the framework need be utilised, with the elements employed depending on what is seen to best fit the discourse in question. In undertaking my analysis, I utilise two key elements from Leach’s (2000) framework: exigence and pathos. Here exigence relates to the context in which the relevant discourse is situated, and includes notions such as the timeliness and/or the appropriateness of said

discourse. Pathos is taken to mean how discourse may be found appealing and the thoughts and emotions it invokes. I begin with exigence.

### **M.3.1 – Exigence, or the context in which Barber and Mourshed situated their work**

Barber and Mourshed (2007: 8) suggest that the prime objective of the McKinsey report was to help:

...inform the educational debate about how to improve the quality of schools and help chart the path to make future reforms more effective in improving the quality of schooling for all children everywhere.

Barber and Mourshed's aim in this study thus appears to be to assist policy-makers in learning from and so improving the performance of their own educational systems, to match that of the world's best: 'best' being explicitly defined by a country's relative national performance in the PISA tests but, as noted above, also implicitly defined in terms of performance against the educational-economic philosophy of the OECD.

In contextualising their work in this way, the authors couple *How the world's best...* to a number of key concepts already outlined within this thesis. The first of these is the linkage frequently made by policy-makers between educational and economic attainment. For example, in the report's foreword it is noted by Andreas Schleicher (Head of the OECD's educational 'Indicators and Analysis' Division) that:

The capacity of countries... to compete in the global economy increasingly depends on whether they can meet a fast-growing demand for high-level skills. This, in turn, hinges on significant improvements in the quality of schooling outcomes...

In addition, the report's use of OECD data also ensures that the notions of 'performance' and 'best performing' concentrate on pupils' abilities in functional subjects such as maths, science and reading (used to measure the future employability of said pupils; Sjøberg, 2007; Ball, 2008). The combination of these two factors with the frequent use of economic language and language relating to the economics of education (on page 2 of the report it is noted that \$2 trillion was spent on education

globally in 2006; on page 6 that, on average, OECD taxpayers might expect 22% more output for their current investments in schooling), illustrate how fully the report has been placed within the education/economic performance paradigm. In other words, the report sits within a political paradigm whose discourse relates education to current and future economic performance and productivity (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Ball, 2007, 2008).

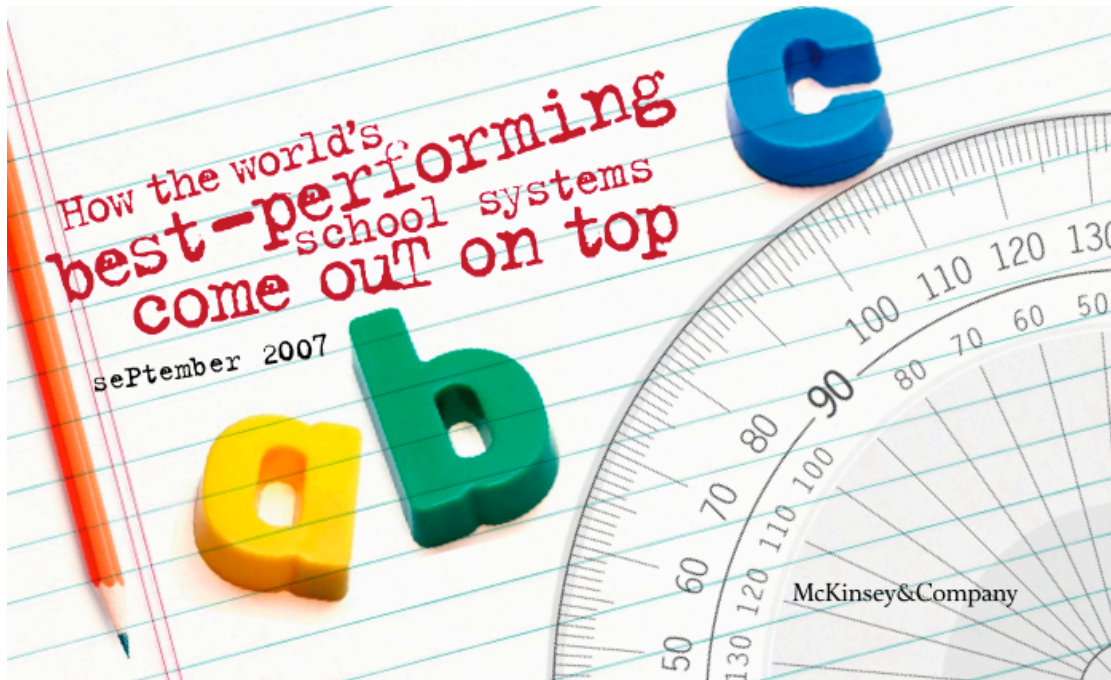
In seeking to derive the factors that have driven the performance of the world's best education systems and by presenting these as 'solutions' to improve performance, Barber and Mourshed have also positioned their analysis to appeal to the 'what works' approach that is favoured by policy-makers (see: Blunkett, 2000; Balls, 2009 and Gove, 2010) but viewed as contentious and problematic by many academics (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Hammersley, 2001; Whitty, 2002; MacLure, 2005; Sharland and Taylor, 2006; Biesta, 2007; Whitty *et al.*, 2009). Recalling the discourse of DCSF (2009), evidence is often seen within educational policy making as being fundamental in identifying both what is working now and what could work more effectively in the future. Barber and Mourshed's discourse (how to improve by learning from the best) clearly illustrates that their analysis has been designed to relate to both of these goals. In addition, by identifying what works across a number of international systems, the report also appeals to policy-makers' desires to 'borrow' policy and ideas. Halpin and Troyna (1995) suggest that there is an important symbolic role attached to the concept of borrowing policy; primarily this is the legitimisation of policy through its association with successful, 'foreign' systems.

An analysis of the report's exigence thus indicates that, at the time of its publication, the McKinsey report would have been regarded by policy-makers as firmly situated within the policy agora of the (as was) New Labour government. Consequently it was positioned by its authors to form part of the gamut of evidence considered by policy-makers. In contextualising their report in such a way, the authors demonstrably employ a strategic approach, which ensures both political relevance and timeliness. The analysis of exigence also suggests that by utilising a 'what works' discourse and by simultaneously tapping into policy-makers' desire to 'borrow' policies from the most successful systems, they also demonstrates that they understand how best to get their findings noticed. This is achieved via the development of reasons or causes for policy-makers to take on board their evidence (Shapiro, 1994; Sechrest *et al.*, 1994; Lavis *et al.*, 2002).

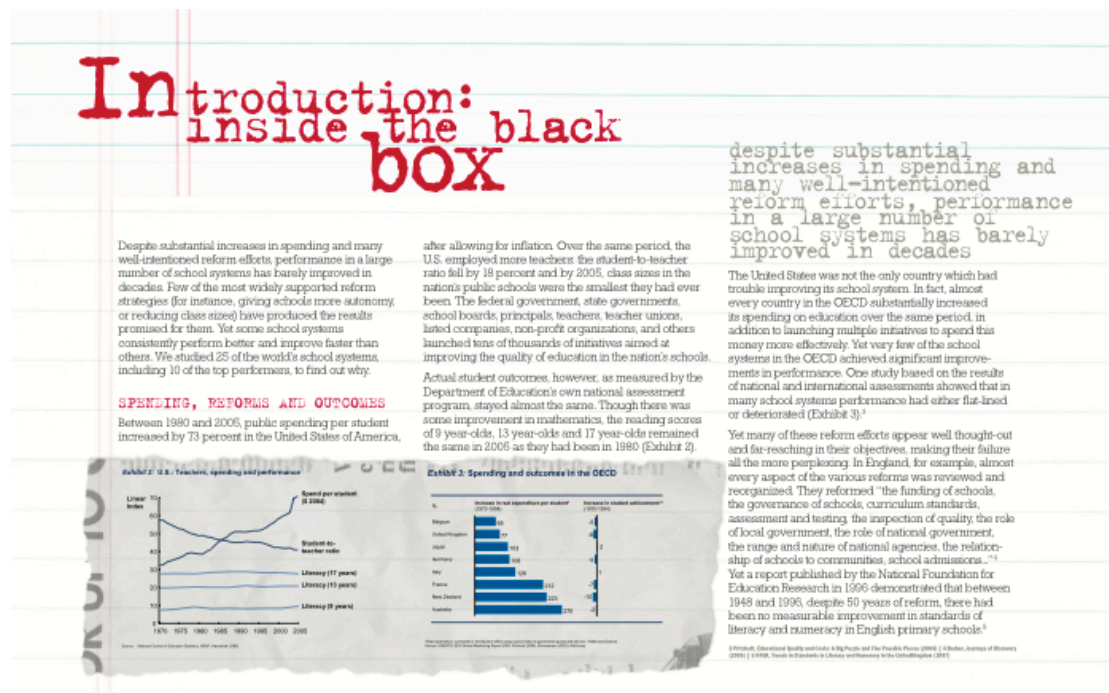
### M.3.2 – Pathos, or how and why Barber and Mourshed’s work appeals to policy-makers

Leach (2000) notes that pathos relates to the appeal of the discourse. As can be seen from the screen grabs set out in Figures x – Figure xi, below, the McKinsey report is extremely stylised in nature and a variety of images relating to teaching and learning (an abacus, a protractor, colouring pencils etc) are utilised throughout. These images combined with its use of font and layout, invoke the notion that the report might have been designed as part of an art and design coursework project. Simultaneously, key themes or points of interest may be quickly ascertained from the report’s graphs and tables. In addition, ‘call-out boxes’ ensure that the report’s key ‘take-out’ messages can be quickly surmised via the briefest of scans and so are readily available/accessible to time (and attention) poor policy-makers. It is clear, therefore, that the report is atypical of academic journal articles and, in terms of its presentation, also differs from other knowledge literature typically encountered by policy-makers.

**Figure x: Front cover of the McKinsey report**



**Figure xi: Use of titles, graphs and ‘call-out boxes’ to highlight the report’s main messages**



The writing tone and style utilised by the report is similar to that used in the types of publications frequently read by policy-makers (for example, that of *The Economist*, *New Scientist*, or *New Statesman*). *The Economist*, for example, utilises a comparable tone and style in reporting the same conclusions:

Schools, it says, need to do three things: get the best teachers; get the best out of teachers; and step in when pupils start to lag behind. That may not sound exactly ‘first-of-its-kind’ (which is how Andreas Schleicher, the OECD's head of education research, describes McKinsey's approach): schools surely do all this already? Actually, they don't. If these ideas were really taken seriously, they would change education radically.<sup>65</sup>

I argue that, as such, the authors' written style is akin to that of a formal discourse which has been ‘translated’ (Fahnestock, 1986) for the popular press. For instance Fahnestock (1986) uses US popular science journal; *Science*, as a working example to show how in such translations, the main purpose of the text becomes celebration rather than validation. Thus popular counterparts of formal or academic text display greater certainty, a degree of hyperbole and a purpose of creating an epideictic ‘wonder’ appeal (Fahnestock, 1986). This is reflected in examples of Barber and

<sup>65</sup> See: <http://www.economist.com>

Mourshed's (2007: 12) own discourse. The first quote, below designed to 'shock' policy-makers into understanding the importance of employing effective teaching staff:

Ten years ago, seminal research based on data from Tennessee showed that if two average eight-year-old students were given teachers, one a high performer, the other a low performer – their performance diverge by more than 50 percentile points within three years.

This second quote aiming to invoke epideictic 'wonder', by illustrating how systems can differ radically from the norm experienced and promoted by policy-makers in England but yet perform more effectively in PISA tests:

In Finland, students do not start school until they are seven years old, and attend classes for only four or five hours a day during their first two years of schooling. Yet by age 15, they score top in the world in tests of mathematics, science, reading and problem solving.

(2007: 13)

The authors also maximise appeal by specifically illustrating how findings might be applied. For example, Barber and Mourshed (2007: 13) set out their three evidence-informed 'maxims' that should be taken on board by readers of the report:

...the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers... the only way to improve outcomes is to improve instruction... the only way for the system to reach the highest performance is to raise the standard of every student...

At the same time they caution that:

... reform efforts which fail to address these drivers are unlikely to deliver the improvements in outcomes that system leaders are striving to achieve. (ibid)

In other words, Barber and Mourshed are suggesting that their approach 'works' where others have not. They also later reinforce this message by noting that past attempts at reform have not been based on a 'what works' approach (2007: 23):



The debate about how to improve the world's school systems has all too often been guided by a set of beliefs that have little basis in fact...

It setting out 'what works' solutions in such a way, Barber and Mourshed demonstrate their understanding that policy-makers are keen to receive 'straightforward' narratives coupled with actionable advice they can understand and put in practice (Lindblom and Cohen, 1979; Kirst, 2000; Court and Young, 2003; Lavis *et al.*, 2003; Davies 2006).

Barber and Mourshed's concern with application is also reflected in the coding and signalling techniques utilised within the McKinsey report. Broadly speaking, the terms coding and signalling form part of a qualitative approach known as semiotic analysis (Brown and Dowling, 1998). Here the term 'code' refers to a visual or acoustic 'memory' of a word, with the 'signal' being the concept the memory is attached to. One example of the use of coding and signalling may be found in Dowling (2007), where Dowling analyses a UK School Mathematics textbook scheme. Dowling argues that the words and images utilised within the text books designed for higher ability pupils seem to signal that their relationship with mathematics should be one where maths is simply harnessed as a gateway to higher achievement (e.g. doing well at maths GCSE provides a stepping stone to 'A' Levels, to a degree and to a managerial position once employed, etc.). Conversely, Dowling argues that the words and images utilised within those books aimed at lower ability pupils instead signal that maths is essential in order for such pupils to be able to function in the everyday world. In other words, the words and images used had the effect of recontextualising maths teaching so that maths relates to everyday practice and of dressing up content so that it appears as a necessary condition for participation in society (for example, you have a budget and the price of various goods, how much can you afford to buy?). Dowling's analysis is set out in more detail in Appendix F (p. 242).

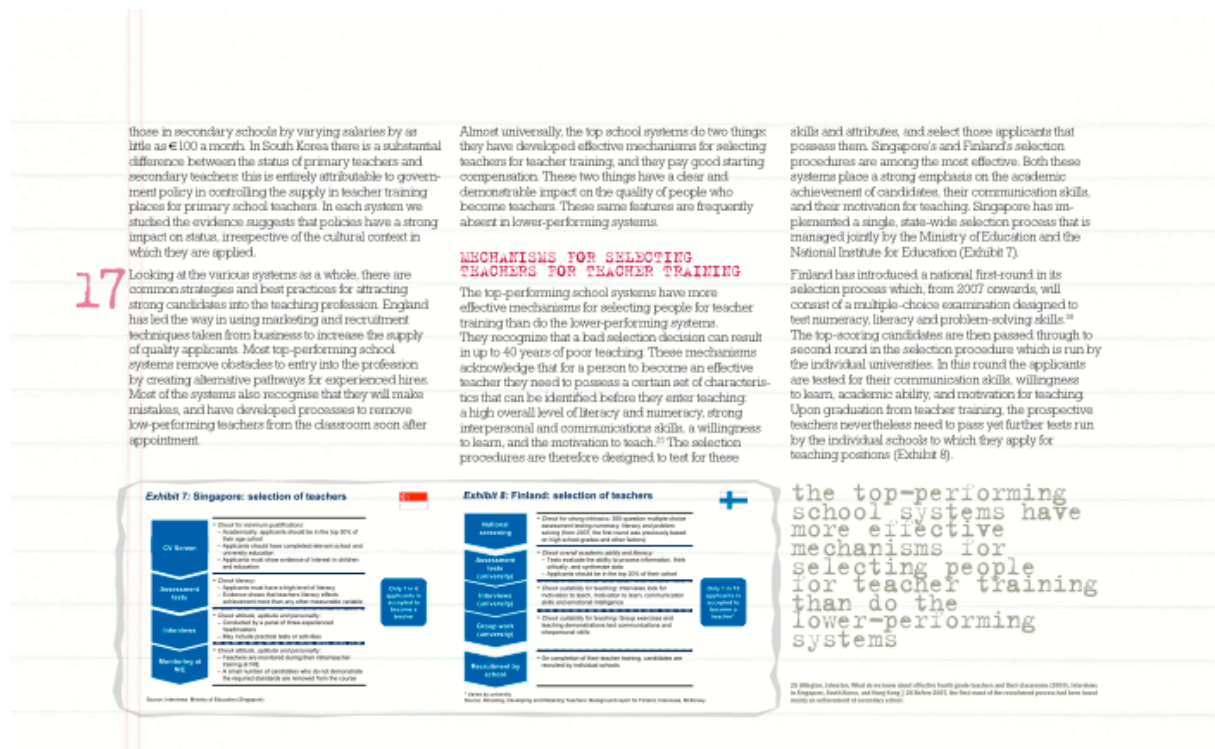
Coding and signalling techniques are also utilised with great success by both book publishers and film distributors. In this instance, both the covers of books and posters advertising films, can quickly signal to readers or audiences the nature or genre of their content through the way in which images are presented and brief descriptors written. Readers and audiences are then able to quickly interpret these codes and decide whether to investigate the book or film further. The book covers set out in Figure xii, for example, use costume and architectural imagery combined with words such as 'traitor' or the name 'Boleyn' to signal that these are historical fiction novels:

**Figure xii: Coding and signalling techniques for historical fiction**



It is argued that the signalling and coding utilised by Barber and Mourshed present their work to suggest that the report is the communication of evidence, but has been designed to make its data relevant. In other words, that the focus of the study is to communicate meaningful points and issues from 'valid' data to policy-makers in an accessible way; although as noted above, the validity of the data in the report is only alluded to, not explicitly addressed. As has already been previously discussed, this is reflected through the wording of the title which is designed to bring with it connotations of 'what works', and via the generous use of graphs, diagrams, tables and 'call-out boxes' to quickly summarise the report's main messages. These codes and signals are combined with the report's landscape page set-up - designed so that it resembles a brochure rather than a journal article - and a font not traditionally associated with knowledge literature (again invoking notions of a brochure rather than anything academic). An example of these codes and signals can be seen in Figure xiii, below:

**Figure xiii: Use of coding and signalling in the presentation of the McKinsey report**



The authors' use of coding and signalling thus display elements of proactivity (Brown, 2009), in that codes and signals are designed to indicate to policy-makers that attempts have been made to anticipate or understand their needs, with findings appropriately positioned to ensure relevance (Kirst, 2000).

#### M.4 – Summary and the themes that were further explored in the interviews

Use of two key elements from Leach's (2000) analytical framework for rhetorical analyses: exigence (or context) and pathos (or appeal), have enabled me to illustrate how Barber and Mourshed (2007) utilised specific strategies in order to ensure that the McKinsey report was contextualised by the needs/desires of, and suitably appealed to, their policy making audience. In particular it has enabled me to illustrate how the authors' use of language and, importantly, appropriate coding and signalling ensured that policy-makers were keen to adopt the information provided.

The analysis also provided a number of themes, which were subsequently explored in the semi-structured, in-depth interviews utilised as part of this thesis' engagement with the empirical. These themes are:

- The use of appropriate discursive styles: the discursive style employed by Barber and Mourshed was seen to be akin to that of formal scientific or academic discourses which have been 'translated' as they move from the academic or scientific community to the popular press (Fahnestock, 1986). The interviews were thus used to explore whether such a style (i.e. one similar in nature to the types of publications frequently read by policy-makers such as that of *The Economist*, *New Scientist*, or *New Statesman*) was regarded as appropriate by policy-makers and how it might be facilitated.
- Coding and signalling: In the interviews, I also explored how appropriate use of coding and signalling might help researchers flag their work to policy-makers in a way that suggests relevance and aspects of proactivity.

## **Appendix N: The knowledge adoption strategies employed by both Barber and Mourshed and the EPPE team**

It is possible to examine the knowledge adoption strategies employed in two of the ‘real life’ examples that have been frequently referenced within this thesis; Barber and Mourshed’s 2007 study; *How the world’s best...*, and the *Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 longitudinal study (EPPE)*. I begin by examining the EPPE study, which provides an example in which all four of the strategies set out in figure vi (the social activity matrix for this project) have been employed. Background on the EPPE study is set out in Appendix E (p. 240).

### **N.1 – The knowledge adoption strategies employed by EPPE**

The first strategy type employed by *EPPE* researchers was ‘contextual’ in nature. As discussed in section 7.2 (p. 175), *EPPE* researchers observed how they and the Early Years Forum spent significant amounts of time and effort developing ‘contextual’ strategies around the notion of ‘early years’, long before any research was undertaken, so that the ground was prepared for the message when it emerged. Such strategies succeeded in ensuring that the ‘early years’ message was one that was seen as socially robust<sup>66</sup>. *EPPE* researchers also argued that being asked to manage such a high profile project on behalf of government indicated that they had become privileged by policy-makers (due to their acknowledged expertise in ‘early years’). This ensured that their initial starting position on figure iii was that of the optimal position in the top left hand corner.

Once in this position, *EPPE* researchers employed ‘policy ready’ strategies to show how their research might impact on policy and ‘promotional’ strategies to ensure that their findings could be accessed by policy-makers. It was noted in section 5.3 (p. 134), for instance, that one interviewee felt that presenting the possible system wide impacts of interventions, both financially and on children’s outcomes (a ‘policy ready’ approach), helped policy-makers better understand how early years policy might be improved. Subsequent use of these ‘policy ready’ findings may then also be inferred from government documents such as *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a*

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<sup>66</sup> Social robustness may accrue from either the use of ‘contextual’ strategies within a given agora, or by ensuring that knowledge or ideas are successfully adopted by policy-makers outside of the agora and so provide the foundation for policies in the formation of future agoras. From the interview data, as there is no suggestion that the Early Years Forum researchers attempted to influence politicians outside of the agora, their strategy is treated as wholly ‘contextual’.

*ten year strategy for childcare* (HMT, 2004) where *EPPE* is cited as providing the main source of evidence on impact. *EPPE*'s 'promotional' strategies may be gleaned both from the interview data and from existing publications. For instance, Sylva *et al.* (2007) suggest regular face-to-face meetings provided access and the opportunity for discussion; the key government researcher involved was used as a main communication channel; the *EPPE* team tailored their communications depending on whether they were disseminating findings to an academic or policy minded audience, and; the key government researcher also helped ensure communication to other stakeholders was 'crystal clear'.

In addition, *EPPE* researchers have also engaged in significant levels of 'traditional' behaviours, for example; the production of both journal papers (e.g. Sylva *et al.* 2007; Taggart *et al.* 2008; Siraj-Blatchford 2010) and conference papers.<sup>67</sup> The *EPPE* team also provided evidence to the Education and Employment Committee on Early Years<sup>68</sup>. All these activities served to enhance perceptions as to the quality and rigour of the study in question and the teams' standing as academics, both within and outside of government. It is suggested that these four strategies combined ensured that not only were *EPPE*'s findings successfully adopted but, since political will and capacity were also in place, they were acted upon.

## **N.2 – The knowledge adoption strategies employed by Barber and Mourshed**

The knowledge adoption strategies employed by Barber and Mourshed with *How the world's best...were* both 'policy ready' and 'promotional' in nature. For example, their stated aim was to provide policy-makers with a way of learning from, and so improving the performance of their own educational systems, to match that of the world's best. As a result of this investigation, the two authors provides three specific 'policy ready' solutions, summarised as (2007: executive summary):

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<sup>67</sup> A full list of conference papers may be found here: <http://eppe.ioe.ac.uk/eppe3-11/eppe3-11papers.htm>

<sup>68</sup> The House of Commons Session 1999-2000 Education and Employment Committee (Education Sub-Committee) Early Years. Minutes of Evidence. Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2000. Evidence given by Professors Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford and Sammons. Published by the Stationery Office Ltd.

The experiences of... top school systems suggests that three things matter most 1) getting the right people to become teachers, 2) developing them into effective instructors and 3) ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

And a point is made that:

These systems demonstrate that the best practices for achieving these three things work irrespective of the culture in which they are employed. These demonstrate that substantial improvement in outcomes is possible in a short period of time and that applying these best practices universally could have enormous impact in improving failing school systems, wherever they might be located.

This message reinforces the point that these solutions will, indeed, aid policy-makers in developing successful policies that might lead to rapid improvements in educational performance. The remainder of the report is then set out into three sections, each dealing with one of the above 'policy ready' solutions, with detail provided on why each matters and how they are addressed by the world's best performing school systems.

In terms of 'promotional' strategies, as can be seen from the screen grabs set out in Appendix M (p. 261), the McKinsey report is extremely stylised in nature. Simultaneously, throughout the report, key themes or points may be quickly ascertained from the report's graphs and tables. In addition, 'call-out boxes' ensure that the report's key 'take-out' messages can be quickly surmised via the briefest of scans and so are readily available/accessible to time and attention poor policy-makers. It is also argued that coding and signalling are successfully employed by Barber and Mourshed to present their work in such a way as to suggest that the focus of the study is to communicate meaningful points and issues to policy-makers. It is suggested, therefore, that Barber and Mourshed's 'promotional' strategies are designed to both enhance the accessibility of the message and the clarity of its presentation.

It is argued, however, that Barber and Mourshed do not employ either 'traditional' or contextualising strategies. For example, the report provides very little detail on either methodology or the sample frame employed and, as noted in Appendix M, doubts have been raised as to its overall rigour as a piece of academic research. The following sentence, for instance, providing the report's only mention of methodological approach:

The report is an outcome of an analysis of the achievements of the best-performing school systems as defined by [PISA data], a survey of the current literature and interviews with more than one hundred experts, policy-makers and practitioners  
(2007: preface)

This may be regarded as an omission of 'traditional' behaviour.

It is suggested that the authors may not have attempted to employ contextualising strategies because there was no perceived need to do so. For example, by the time of the report's publication in 2007, Michael Barber's credibility had already been long entrenched in the eyes of New Labour and civil service policy-makers. Ball (2008), for instance, notes that Barber had gained wide respect within government through his roles as Chief Advisor to the Secretary of State for Education on school standards, Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister on delivery and as Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. In addition, his report was published by McKinsey and Co., a globally respected management consultancy with existing links to, and influence in, the world of policy. As such, it was not only written, but was also produced, by actors operating at the top end of Davies' (2006) policy making food chain.

At the same time Barber and Mourshed had already coupled *How the world's best...* to a number of socially robust concepts. The first of these is the linkage made by policy-makers between educational and economic attainment (Stronach and MacLure, 1997; Ball, 2007; 2008). In addition, by seeking to provide insight into the factors that have driven the performance of the world's best education systems, Barber and Mourshed also positioned their analysis to appeal to the 'what works' approach argued to be favoured by policy-makers (for example, as referenced by Blunkett, 2000; Balls, 2009 and Gove, 2010). Finally, by identifying what works across a number of international systems, Barber and Mourshed also appeal to policy-makers' desires to 'borrow' policy and ideas (Halpin and Troyna, 1995; Perry *et al.*, 2010). The authors may have therefore regarded their knowledge adoption starting position as favourable enough not to have required further effort in this area.

It is thus argued that, in the case of *How the world's best...* Barber and Mourshed succeeded in having the report's findings adopted by dint of 'promotional' and 'policy ready' strategies alone (see Brown, 2009 and interview data in Appendix M, p. 261,



above). This indicates, along with my analysis of the *EPPE* study, that the choice of strategies employed by academic researchers should relate to their relative knowledge adoption position (in terms of figure iii) and the their ability or capacity to act.